

Revolutions and *Rough Cuts*: Bodily Technologies for Regulating Sexuality
in Contemporary Iran

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Submitted in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy
under the Executive Committee
of the Graduate School of Arts and Sciences

COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY

2013

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ABSTRACT

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Studies on the regulation of sexuality in the Islamic Republic of Iran are often focused on the regulatory tool of criminalization in relation to sex and sexuality. More recently, popular academic debates have centered on the revolutionary sexual practices among a subculture of upper-middle class Tehrani youth. Yet the scope of practices, methods, and technologies used to regulate and express sexuality in contemporary Iran are manifold and diverse, conflictive and collaborative, and seldom reflective of the state's ideological imperative of an "Islamic sexual morality."

This dissertation examines the regulation of sexuality in Iran from 1965 to 2012, a period beginning with the launching of modernization reforms under the Pahlavi dynasty and ending well into the third decade of the Islamic Republic. As seen through state, religious, juridical, popular cultural, and public health discourses on sexuality, this project examines the construction and application of bodily technologies —meaning the physical and conceptual modes of regulation enacted to discipline and/or control "immodest" and "deviant" expressions of men and women. This project concentrates on five unique sites: a popular women's journal, a red-light district, temporary marriage, iconic public statues, and a HIV-AIDS advocacy organization in Tehran. In each site, I identify, compare, and contextualize the methods of regulation, posing the following questions: how are bodily technologies constructed discursively and socially in Iran?

And, in particular, what values and perspectives are incorporated in them, serving to dictate what kinds of realities, lifestyles, and desires are both permissible and accessible?

By tracing the construction and strategic application of both old and new modes of regulation, I discuss how each mode engages with the forces of modernity, consumerism, prostitution, and religious discourse. Also, I examine how sites and modes of regulation mutate into each other, breaking form to join with other disciplinary methods to condition a similar kind of isolation, concealment, and stigmatization.

I argue that even despite the change in regimes, from the secular, pro-West Pahlavi monarchy to the clerical-led Islamic Republic, there are shifts and continuities in the modes of regulation. This is especially evident during periods of economic, social, and political crises. Moreover, I contend that in most of these sites, the body is one of the ways through which sexuality is regulated; in others, sexuality is disciplined through the spatial cleansing of brothel sites and, after 1979, in the official promotion of temporary marriages to assist in controlling the rise of prostitution. I establish that through the processes of sexualization and desexualization, modification and erasure, and denial and acceptance, sexuality is regulated not only through the disciplining of women and their bodies, but also through the dispersing and internalizing of positive ideals about health, family, marriage, modesty, and pleasure for the Iranian citizen and the general body politic.

The impetus for my project stems from what I believe to be a necessity in reviewing and challenging the dominant, scholarly discourse on gender and sexuality within the discipline of Iranian studies, which tends to (re)present Iranian women as political and/or religious subjects, in lieu of women attempting to navigate and construct

meaning for themselves in such a complex sociological terrain. In academic, state-sponsored, and Twelver Shi'a religious discourses, the tendency is to focus on medicalizing, gendering, and anatomizing Iranian women through the paradigms of modernization and nationalism. My work is an intervention in these debates, as I incorporate sociological fieldwork conducted in Iran over a five-year time period, when I interviewed a cross-section of Iranian women about issues of health, body image, maternity, and sexuality—among many others . This research offers valuable ethnographic material not only for studies on sexuality, but also for sociological studies on the complex construction of identity, personhood, and power in the contemporary Middle East.

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

No labor of love, spanning seven years, is the culmination of the effort and intellect of one woman. Nay, every dissertation is an orchestrated effort of countless hands and infinite voices. Once I began this journey knee-deep in questions, I soon met academics, lay scholars, librarians, scientists, physicians, housewives, engineers, researchers, activists, custodial workers, taxi drivers, lawyers, intelligence officials, mothers, uncles, social workers, and journalists who each helped me navigate through the murky terrain of “why” and “how.” The responses were always idiosyncratic, and the attempt to make sense of this goliath project was often a group effort, accented by the spirited opinions of many heroes. In this collaborative project, there are no peripheral characters; there is only a nucleus of colleagues, friends, and family members for whom I owe my heartfelt gratitude and loyalty.

I begin by expressing my sincere thanks to my advisor Professor Hamid Dabashi. His many years of encouragement and advice have been a constant throughout this doctoral tenure. From him, I have learned to toughen my stance and strengthen my intellectual core as I attempt to move seamlessly between academic and professional circles. I offer thanks to committee member Gil Anidjar, my advocate and sage, who spent many hours critiquing my work, in person, on Skype, and via email. My intellectual growth would have been missing a crucial component had I not taken his courses on deconstruction. I also express gratitude to committee members Marnia Lazreg, Neferti Tadiar, and Partha Chatterjee. I credit Marnia for sharpening my feminist eye and inspiring me to stand on

my own two legs, despite the chaos. Neferti trained me to speak truth to power, be they imperial, global, or ideological. I am thankful, too, to Partha, whose courses on Nationalism and anthropological research encouraged me to pursue ethnographic fieldwork, despite the remonstrations and hesitations I encountered.

I would like to convey special thanks to Professor Shirin Ahmad-Nia. Sociology in Iran does not exist without her insight. Zari Tashakor, Leila Faghfour, and Fourogh Azizi will forever comprise the triumvirate of friends and research partners who helped me navigate through translations, as well as the National Library in Tehran. To great Agha Mansourian and Mojtabeh Shabbestari: the latter's philosophy classes helped me connect the dots in more ways than I can count; the former's compassion and humility demonstrated to me how to cultivate true relationships—in sickness and in health.

To the wonderful “editors and technicians” who meliorated the many drafts of this project, namely Leila Mouri, Elizabeth Johnston, Yasmine Ramadan, Erline Maruhom, Travis Lindhorst, Alireza Mortezaei, Joshu Harris, Laura Muggeo, Kevin Stoy, and Kellie Bryan. Their love and support carried me to the finish line. Abji Leila and Joshu scoured every sentence, with gargantuan endurance and kindness. Yasmine, the rock, protected my sanity, showed me resilience, and forced me to get off the computer at sunrise. Alireza listened to me in many corners of the globe, teaching me to strengthen my inner gauge. Elizabeth was an angelic force, accompanying me every step of the way—especially when compiling PDFs.

To my parents, Massoud and Olivia Batmanghelichi, I am enthusiastically indebted. I share the PhD with my father, who instilled within me curiosity and fearlessness with which to rage against the machine, theoretical and material. I credit my mother's work ethic and generosity for providing me with the educational opportunities to attain my goals. I also would like to thank my sister Suzanne and brother Kaveh.

I appreciate the kindness of my extended family in Iran, including all cousins, aunts, and uncles. Moving mountains to ensure both my safety and academic integrity, Ameh Farahnaz and Amoo Faramarz went above and beyond the call of family. Ameh reminded me of the grand aim of my work: to write honestly and fairly, to resist the temptation to rush an intricately layered analysis. Her guidance and love deeply moves me.

There are friends whom I would like to individually thank from Tehran, London, New York, Detroit, Laguna Beach, Coria, Charleston, and Amsterdam: Azadeh Ansari, Babak Orandi, Anita Balocating, Matteen Mokalla, Anahi Alviso-Marino, Daniel Scruggs, Katherine Brown, Rahimeh Andalibian, Soheilah Rodjan, Ania Sanzhar, Hani Mansourian, Mona Sabetian, Maryam Ommy, Mandana Basti, Shohreh Behrouzi, Michiel Kruijff, Bradley Monash, and the Sarlak family (Agha Ali, Farzine joon, Sepideh, Saharnaz and Siavash). Each has taught me to laugh at myself, let go, and look for silver linings.

Finally, to 90-year-old Mama, I owe her my life.

DEDICATION

I dedicate this dissertation to my loving family: the Batmanghelichis,
the Lindhorsts, the Maruhoms, and, of course, beloved Mama.

INTRODUCTION

In Iranian society, sexuality comes to be a cultural cynosure, because of which, it is simultaneously perceived as precious and treacherous to its original master.

(Shahla Haeri, *Law of Desire*, 1989)¹

This dissertation project effectively began in the summer of 2007, when I first noticed the mutilated breasts of mannequins in Haft-e Tir Square, one of Tehran's bustling clothing districts. The female mannequins were wrapped in exquisite designs and adorned with faux jewels and Louis Vuitton patterned scarves. Yet, they appeared oddly deformed. The breasts of every mannequin had been cut crudely from different angles, apparently by saws and knives ill-suited to the task of modification. Peeking out as jagged plateaus covered in fabric, the breasts were unlike anything I had seen in window shop displays. Some breasts looked like cut-off spherical mounds. Others resembled miniature tree stumps. Equally alarmed and amused, I asked friends and relatives if they had noticed anything peculiar about these displays. One friend joked darkly, "Oh, the mannequins have breast cancer!"

Documentary filmmaker Firouzeh Khosrovani has described the mutilation of mannequins in Tehran's shop windows as a "rough cut."² By 2008, such rough cuts were becoming widespread in shopping districts across the capital, the result of a government campaign that began in 2006. Under the crackdown, curvaceous mannequins, particularly those dressed in any way revealingly, were forbidden, while boyish body shapes with minimal curves were preferred. Over the last five years, I have observed mannequins in

¹ Shahla Haeri, *Law of Desire: Temporary Marriage in Iran* (London: I.B. Tauris & Co Ltd, 1989), p. 70.

² "Rough Cut," directed by Firouzeh Khosrovani (Tehran: n.p. 2007). See also Nina Power, "Mannequins, Manners, and Mutilation," *Cabinet Magazine* 301 (Summer 2008): pp. 21-25.

various states of alteration: many sported half-heads, or no heads at all; most mannequins had flattened chests; and, in some instances, the mannequins were completely replaced with wire frames shaped into crude human forms.

The state-mandated alteration of mannequins and other representations of women was the impetus for this research project. Indeed, an emerging trend was taking shape, whereby women, and the representational art depicting them, were being widely and publicly derided by leading clerics. They characterized the female form as naked, obscene, and scandalous, possessing an insidious power to provoke spontaneous arousal in men. As a result, mannequins were not the only representations of the female form being deliberately modified into supposedly modest forms. Statues and other three-dimensional public art works had part of their figures covered or veiled to hew more closely to official definitions of modesty.

The simultaneous threat and allure of women—even in their mutilated and isolated forms—have occupied pivotal places in the formulation and implementation of Iran's social policy. The notion that merely gazing upon the physical features of a woman will lead to societal corruption has caused, in recent years, the state to accelerate its censorship and reform of representations of women in public space. No longer are depictions of women—especially those perceived to be dressed immodestly—tolerated for display, lest they entice onlookers' desire. These provisions have triggered cultural and political clashes, unfolding on city streets and in towns and villages across Iran. For many Iranians, acting, dressing, and speaking out against social policies and restrictions have come at a heavy price—for men and women alike. From public admonishment to fines and lashes, this range of disciplinary practices is reasoned to help control and

modify social conduct in private and public spaces. Enacting policies to reform male-female interactions and physical appearance are necessary steps in maintaining the family unit and protecting public morality in Iranian society.

The Islamic Republic's constitutional dictum, "good moral values based on the Islamic faith,"³ formed the conceptual rubric guiding Ayatollah Khomeini's reformation of Iranian society into an Islamic society. For three decades, the core values of this dictum have endured but the policies and methods of regulation have shifted in content and expanded in scope. Government bodies, such as the Supreme Council of the Cultural Revolution, began devising policies in which the state's ideals of Muslim women, as pious, modest, and self-sacrificing mothers and wives,⁴ were socially, religiously, and legally enforced.⁵ Underlying these very ideals was the notion that a woman's femininity and sexuality could potentially endanger the preservation and maintenance of public morality.⁶ In countless treatises, essays, and speeches, Shi'a religious scholars (*ulama*) and Iranian officials have stated, as a matter-of-fact, that the female body stirs both desirable and undesirable emotions in men. A woman's body, as a catalyst for arousal, is

³ See *Islamic Republic of Iran Constitution*, Article 3.

⁴ Saeed Rahnema and Haideh Moghissi "Clerical Oligarchy and the Question of 'Democracy' in Iran," Iran Chamber, 2001, accessed 25 July 2011, http://www.iranchamber.com/government/articles/clerical_oligarchy_democracy_iran.php.

⁵ Zohreh T. Sullivan explains: "Gradually, as evidenced by the writings of Khomeini and Motahari, all differences withered into a single truth: the only acceptable woman in the Islamic state was the Muslim woman who was the 'pillar of family,' and who abided by all the laws laid down in the *shari'a*, who would accept the misogynist gender coding prescribed for her by the new government's version of Islam." See Zohreh T. Sullivan, "Eluding the Feminist, Overthrowing the Modern? Transformations in Twentieth-Century Iran," in *Remaking Women: Feminism and Modernity in the Middle East*, p. 233.

⁶ See Firoozeh Kashani-Sabet, *Frontier Fictions: Shaping the Iranian Nation, 1804-1946* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999; Camron Michael Amin, "Selling and Saving 'Mother Iran': Gender and the Iranian Press in the 1940s," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 33 (2001): pp. 335-361.

taboo-laden, and therefore must be appropriately managed, controlled, hidden, and in certain cases reformed.

This dissertation is engaged with the fundamental question: how are bodily technologies constructed discursively and socially in Iran, and in particular, what values and perspectives are built into them, serving to dictate what kinds of realities, lifestyles, and desires are both permissible and accessible?⁷ By “bodily technology,” I mean in its broadest sense the physical and conceptual modes of regulation enacted to discipline and/or control the physical, emotional, and sexual expressions of men and women. According to Gill Valentine, bodily technology is “the solution to the problem of the deviant body.”⁸ In *Social Geographies: Space and Society*, Valentine explains that the purpose of a bodily technology, such as physical and sensory aids (he uses the examples of a hearing aid and wheelchair), is to help “‘disabled’ individuals... categorized as socially inferior and a ‘problem’ for society.”⁹

That a bodily technology holds the power to improve a “deviant body” resonates with the reasons , provided by Iran’s clerical authority, why certain policy measures are enlisted to control and reform social relations and sexuality in the Islamic Republic. As the case of the disfigured mannequins attests, representations of the female body, according to Iran’s morality police, provoke an uncontrollable sexuality in the

⁷ The inspiration for this question comes from a similar question posed by technological theorist Thomas Jenkins in an unpublished paper on the usage of technological devices and interventions onto the body. See Thomas Jenkins, “Emotional Prostheses: Bodily Technologies for Emotional Expression,” ThomasJenkins.net, 2008, accessed September 9, 2011, <http://www.thomasjenkins.net/prostheses/EmotionalProstheses.pdf>.

⁸ Gill Valentine, *Social Geographies: Space and Society* (Essex: Pearson Education Ltd., 2001), p. 45.

⁹ Valentine, p. 45.

heterosexual male gaze and body. Even a woman's hair is viewed as a catalyst for arousal, for it is symbolic of female sexuality and hence must be appropriately managed, controlled, hidden, and in certain cases, reformed.¹⁰

What are the exact disciplinary methods employed to control societal and sexual “deviance”? How do these regulatory modes impact particular social groups who are associated with “problematic” or “deviant” behavior in society? For example, are there any connections and similarities discernible in how social policy and regulations impact prostitutes, temporary wives, and HIV-positive women—women who are heavily stigmatized and face discrimination— along with the mutilation of dress window mannequins? Moreover, do bodily technologies change form and purpose, depending on shifts in objective, target audience, and political agenda? Lastly, in state and religious discourses on female sexuality, how is a woman's body constructed as the site and source of sexual deviance?

As Elizabeth Bernstein and Laurie Schaffner have pointed out, “Sexuality is *regulated*—governed, directed, and made more uniform— through the rule of law as well as through media, nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), educators, and others engaged in the ‘helping professions.’ Sexuality is also regulated by diffuse state policies seemingly unrelated to questions of gender and erotic intimacy.” The regulation of sexuality in the contemporary Iranian context, in many respects, exemplifies this statement. However, what is unique to Iran is how these regulatory modes are constructed, implemented, rejected, and remodeled during moments of social, political,

¹⁰ Ashraf Zahedi, “Contested Meaning of the Veil and Political Ideologies of Iranian Regimes,” *Journal of Middle East Women's Studies* 3, no. 3 (Fall 2007): p. 90.

and economic crises throughout Iran's modern history, from the rule of Muhammad Reza Pahlavi (1941-1979) to the present-day Islamic Republic.

This dissertation concentrates on the regulation of sexuality in five unique sites: a popular women's journal, a red-light district, temporary marriage, iconic public statues, and a HIV-AIDS advocacy organization in Tehran. In each site, bodily technologies employed to prohibit, modify, and/or regulate sexuality are identified, contextualized, and placed in juxtaposition to each other. Each site represents one aspect of the politics of intimacy, illustrating the distinct ways that the Iranian state facilitates the sexual and social control of men and women.¹¹

In this dissertation, I argue that even despite the change in regimes, from Pahlavi dynasty to clerical-led Islamic Republic, there are shifts and continuities in the modes of regulation. This is especially evident during periods of transition, whether from a monarchy to an Islamic government or in the course of a decade of post-war reconstruction and economic liberalization after an eight-year war with Iraq. In most of these sites, the body is one of the ways through which sexuality is regulated; in others, sexuality is disciplined through the spatial cleansing of brothel sites and, after 1979, in the official promotion of temporary marriages to assist in controlling the rise of prostitution. Moreover, I establish that through the processes of sexualization and desexualization, modification and erasure, and denial and acceptance, sexuality is regulated not only through the disciplining of women and their bodies, but also through the dispersing and internalizing of positive ideals about health, family, marriage, and pleasure for the Iranian citizen and the general body politic.

¹¹ Elizabeth Bernstein and Laurie Schaffner, eds. *Regulating Sex: The Politics of Intimacy and Identity* (New York: Routledge, 2005), p. xii.

Review of Scholarship: Mapping the Theoretical and Ethnographic Fields

In *Regulating Sex: The Politics of Intimacy and Identity*, Bernstein and Schaffner advise: “In order to understand the regulation of sexuality, we must situate it within its broad political context, exploring the mutual constitution of public and private, family and nation, and sexual and social life.”¹² Bernstein and Schaffner’s assessment speaks to the necessity of identifying factors that, despite their apparent opposition to each another, are equally consequential in impacting social policies and social tensions emerging from debates around sexuality.¹³

Because this dissertation topic is located temporally in contemporary Iran, I have consulted the extensive body of literature focusing on the aftermath of the 1979 Revolution, which is indeed vast and substantive. Ervand Abrahamian, Hamid Dabashi, Asef Bayat, Ali Ansari, Nikki Keddie, Ziba Mir-Hosseini, Said Amir Arjomand, Minoo Moallem, Afsaneh Najmabadi, and Parvin Paidar have each produced pioneering analyses on the Islamic Republic’s main political and social actors, its economic structure, and institutional changes taking place immediately after the Revolution.¹⁴ Most

¹² Bernstein and Schaffner, p. xiii.

¹³ Ibid., p. xiii.

¹⁴ See Ervand Abrahamian, *Iran between Two Revolutions* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1982); Asef Bayat, *Street Politics: Poor People’s Movements in Iran* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997); Kashani-Sabet (2011); Ali Ansari, *Iran under Ahmadinejad: The Politics of Confrontation* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2007) and *Iran, Islam and Democracy: The Politics of Managing Change* (London: Chatham House, 2006); Arjomand, *After Khomeini: Iran under His Successors* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009) and *The Turban for the Crown: The Islamic Revolution in Iran* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988); Paidar, *Women and the Political Process in Twentieth-Century Iran* (1997); Nikki Keddie and Yann Richard, *Modern Iran: Roots and Results of Revolution* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003); Ziba Mir-Hosseini, *Islam and Gender: The Religious Debate in Contemporary Iran* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999); and Hamid Dabashi, *Theology of Discontent: The*

of these studies, however, privilege the role of politics and the economy over the inner dynamics and experiences of the social domain. Furthermore, they rely primarily on textual and visual sources, such as government documents and photographs, respectively. Although these scholars have applied various levels of analysis, rarely have they studied sexuality in terms of the disciplinary methods applied to regulate and modify social relations. They neither factor ideals of health and modesty nor consider spatial constructs into their analyses of the legal and political transformations taking place during the post-revolutionary period.¹⁵ Moreover, this body of literature is typically divided between pre- and post-Revolution; there are few authors who trace the ruptures and connections between these periods, comparing these movements by increments of decades.¹⁶

One of the prime issues addressed by scholars writing on “the women question” in the Islamic Republic is the infringement and modification of women’s civil and political rights after Ayatollah Khomeini and his legion of supporters came to power in 1979.¹⁷ Janet Afary, Valentine Moghadam, Minoo Moallem, Hamideh Sedghi, and Afsaneh Najmabadi individually discuss different aspects of the state’s social and

Ideological Foundation of the Islamic Revolution in Iran (New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 2006) and *Iran: A People Interrupted* (New York: New Press, 2008).

¹⁵ See Arjomand (1988, 2009); Dabashi (2006); Mir-Hosseini (1999).

¹⁶ As a side note, in the following paragraphs, I speak about Kamran Talattof’s research, which I believe does focus on tracing shifts in sexuality discourse from the 1970s until present day. Moreover, I highlight the works of scholars Paidar and Misagh Parsa. Paidar studies the historical development of the role and place of women in Iranian society since 1900 until the first ten years since the establishment of the Islamic Republic. Parsa concentrates on the social causes of the Iranian Revolution, looking at the major participants, such as merchants, artisans, workers, the clergy and secular organizations, in the revolutionary conflicts until the formation of a theocracy in 1981. See Misagh Parsa, *Social Origins of the Iranian Revolution*. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1989.

¹⁷ See Minoo Moallem, *Between Warrior Brother and Veiled Sister: Islamic Fundamentalism and the Politics of Patriarchy in Iran* (Berkeley: University of California, 2005); Valentine Moghadam, *Modernizing Women: Gender and Social Change in the Middle East* (Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers, Inc., 2003); Haleh Esfandiari, *Reconstructed Lives: Women & Iran’s Islamic Revolution* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997).

political intolerance, highlighting gender discriminatory passages in Iran's civil and criminal codes, as well as in Shi'a doctrine and jurisprudence.¹⁸ Afary, Moghadam, and Moallem have written extensively on the usurpation of women's rights in the face of government restrictions, such as compulsory *hejab* and sex segregation in the public sphere.¹⁹

The subject of sexuality is a recent scholarly enterprise within Middle Eastern studies and Iranian studies. Within the field of Middle Eastern studies, there is landmark research on the study of gender and sexualities in conversation with scholars working on Euro-American lesbian/gay/queer studies.²⁰ Although these interventions were penned within the past five years, they have contributed significantly to challenging universalizing treatments of sexuality, situating the discourse within larger colonial and imperialist contexts. Kathryn Babayan, Joseph Massad, and Afsaneh Najmabadi have initiated a crucial dialogue on the different genealogies of sexuality, questioning

¹⁸ See Afary (2009); Moallem (2005); Moghadam, (2003); Hamideh Sedghi, *Women and Politics in Iran: Veiling, Unveiling, and Reveiling* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

¹⁹ See Valentine Moghadam, *Modernizing Women: Gender and Social Change in the Middle East* (Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers, Inc., 2003); Farzaneh Milani, *Veiling and Words: The Emerging Voices of Iranian Women Writers* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1992); Ashraf Zahedi, "Contested Meaning of the Veil and Political Ideologies of Iranian Regimes," *Journal of Middle East Women's Studies* 3, no. 3 (Fall 2007): pp. 75-98.

²⁰ See Kathryn Babayan and Afsaneh Najmabadi, eds., *Islamicate Sexualities: Translations Across Temporal Geographies of Desire* (Boston: President and Fellows of Harvard College, 2008), Preface. See also Joseph Massad, *Desiring Arabs* (Chicago: University of Press, 2007). Hamid Dabashi has done seminal research on Iranian modern artist Shirin Neshat. See Hamid Dabashi, "Shirin Neshat: Transcending the Boundaries of an Imaginative Geography" in *The Last Word*, ed. Octavio Zaya (San Sebastian, Spain, Museum of Modern Art, 2005). He has also written about the figure of woman in post-revolutionary cinema as a site of contestation between "a metaphysics of concealment and an aesthetics of revelation." See Hamid Dabashi, "Body-less faces: Mutilating Modernity and Abstracting Women in an 'Islamic Cinema,'" *Visual Anthropology* 10, no. 2 (1998): pp. 361-380. Per the subjects of female sexuality, marriage, and divorce in Iran, the works of both Mir-Hosseini and Shahla Haeri are some of the best analyses on these topics from the perspective of Islamic jurisprudence and civil and penal laws. See Shahla Haeri, *Law of Desire: Temporary Marriage in Iran* (London: I.B. Tauris & Co Ltd, 1989); Ziba Mir-Hosseini, *Islam and Gender: The Religious Debate in Contemporary Iran* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999) and *Marriage on Trial: A Study of Islamic Family Law* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2000).

theoretical and epistemic assumptions about the knowledge and knowledge production of sexuality for peoples of the Middle East.²¹ Babayan and Najmabadi's *Islamicate Sexualities: Translations across Temporal Geographies* is a pioneering anthology on "a new field of historical knowledge and site of knowledge production—that of Islamic sexuality studies."²² Attempting to broaden gender and sexualities studies to include Islamicate sexuality studies, the anthology marks the launching of a conceptual movement away from the dichotomous, Foucauldian conceptualization of the discourses of desire—between the western *scientia sexualis* and the Eastern *ars erotica*.²³ By interrogating these taxonomies and highlighting moments of entwinement and mutual complicity between these discourses (which the authors describe as "kindred histories of power relations"),²⁴ *Islamicate Sexualities* offers alternative models for studying Islamicate sexuality by "crossing paths" between Middle Eastern studies and sexuality studies, employing sources from medieval literature, history, psychoanalysis, comparativisms, and translation.²⁵ Likewise, Massad's intervention, *Desiring Arabs*, examines Orientalist scholarship on Islamic and Arabic homosexuality, asserting that the notion of sexual identity was a function of modernity. Massad critiques Euro-American attempts to universalize the term "sexuality," arguing that the term is itself an

²¹ See Babayan and Najmabadi (2008) and Massad (2007).

²² Babayan and Najmabadi, p. 3.

²³ Ibid., pp. vii-viii. As discussed in Foucault's *A History of Sexuality*, *scientia sexualis* is a form of knowledge about sex that developed in the modern West through confession. By contrast, *ars erotica* is a knowledge of sensual pleasure to be experienced or intensified, transferred through secrets, and developed in the cultures of Rome, south Asia, and the Middle East. See Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality, Vol. 2: The Use of Pleasure*, trans. R. Hurley (London: Penguin, 1985).

²⁴ Ibid., p. viii.

²⁵ Ibid., Preface.

epistemological and ontological category. And, it is a product of specific social formations and histories of the Euro-American cultural and political experience, which traveled to the Middle East by way of European colonialism.²⁶

Most scholarship on gender and sexuality in modern Iran highlights the significance of hygiene, nationalist symbols, and religious beliefs, which were pervasive in the late nineteenth and first half of the twentieth century, during the formative years of the modern, Iranian nation-state.²⁷ For example, Najmabadi's *Women with Mustaches, Men without Beards* is a study of the centrality of gender and sexuality, exploring the shaping of Iranian modernist culture and nationalist discourses from the late nineteenth century, fostering an anxiety-ridden, heteronormalized patriarchal order.²⁸ Similarly, *Sexual Politics in Modern Iran*, written by historian Janet Afary, is a historical survey of two hundred years of diverse sexual practices from the Qajar period to the first term (2005-2009) of Iran's President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad. Analyzing European traveler accounts, print media, contemporary women's magazines, literature, and oral testimony, Afary chronicles the evolution of the discourse of sexuality, maintaining that the construction of heterosexuality in Iran was greatly impacted by modernizing, political, and social interventions taking place domestically and influenced by western notions of sexuality. She explains that in the late nineteenth century, a notion of "normative

²⁶ See Massad (2007).

²⁷ See Najmabadi (2005), Mir-Hosseini (1999, 2000), Moallem (2005), and Kashani-Sabet (2011).

²⁸ See Afsaneh Najmabadi, *Women with Mustaches and Men without Beards: Gender and Sexual Anxieties of Iranian Modernity* (Berkeley: University of California, 2005).

sexuality” occluded homoerotic practices in Iran, leading to new sexual norms and practices.²⁹

The literature on the construction of sexuality discourse in the Islamic Republic is in its nascent stages, consisting of a handful of works on the following subjects: shifts in the sexual norms of Iran’s urban populations; the success and failures of popular, modern artists before and after the Revolution; and permanent and temporary marriage practices during the Republic’s formative years. Kamran Talattof has studied developments within the discourse of sexuality in Iran by tracing the histories of non-elite and popular cultural actors prior to and after the Revolution. In *Modernity, Sexuality and Ideology in Iran: The Life and Legacy of Popular Iranian Female Artists*, Talattof contends that since the Revolution, the process of modernity was hindered by the silencing and stigmatizing of an open, intellectual discourse on sex, sexual health, and sexuality in the Islamic Republic. He maintains that official discourses of liberals and reformists, among others, excluded a modern view of sexuality, leading to dichotomous notions of sexuality between the mind and body.³⁰

²⁹ In the last section of this piece, on the study of gender politics of the Islamic Republic, Afary discusses the formation of Islamist women’s movements and the emergence of “Islamic feminism” in reaction to stringent restrictions imposed by hard-line clerics. She surmises that through women’s activism, press, and writings, new debates about their legal rights and status emerge, culminating in shifting gender roles and the pushing of traditional social limits. See Janet Afary, *Sexual Politics in Modern Iran*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009).

³⁰ Kamran Talattof, *Modernity, Sexuality and Ideology in Iran: The Life and Legacy of Popular Iranian Female Artists* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2011), p. 6. As an illustration of the failed process of modernity in Iran, Talattof profiles the life and times of popular artist Shahrzad; he claims she “represented the culture of the Pahlavi era, as a sign of women’s expression of sexuality. Following her popularity during the 1970s and subsequent imprisonment and homelessness after the Revolution, he illustrates, through her story, Iran’s struggle to accept overt expressions of sexuality. For Talattof, Shahrzad’s life story represents the struggle between modernity and religious fundamentalism, serving as “windows through which to explore the question of and the quest for modernity in Iran.” Ibid., pp. 5-7.

Although these scholarly works on gender and sexuality in Iran are groundbreaking, their methodology is based on analyzing textual material, such as print media, photographs, and official documents. Perhaps their distinction in the field is based, in part, on the fact that there is a dearth of sociological literature on the subject. For a research area that is often passed over is sexuality as a site of empirical investigation. The reasons for this neglect are both political and logistical, as concrete, reliable, and extensive qualitative research studies have been hard to come by.³¹ This research would require conducting fieldwork in Iran, and thus extant literature on gender and sexuality must enter an interdisciplinary dialogue with this sociological and ethnographic material.

There are indeed exceptions to this predicament. Haeri's *Law of Desire* is a pioneering anthropological study on temporary marriage arrangements (in Arabic, *mut'a*) discussed in Twelver Shi'a ideology and experienced by Iranian women.³² Interviewing women and high-ranking ayatollahs in Qom, Haeri discusses the legal and experiential understandings of *mut'a* (in Persian, *sigheh*) to understand how sexuality is constructed in religious and public discourses. Shi'a *ulama*, in maintaining that *mut'a* is intended for sexual pleasure (unlike permanent marriage, which is intended for procreation), justify its

³¹ The dearth of this research is due, in part, to the many foreseen and unforeseen challenges for scholars seeking to conduct research in Iran. It is a precarious task in large part because political, social, and cultural conditions and circumstances often determine when and how research will be conducted and even if it will proceed. Researchers working inside Iran are not able to conduct research without the approval of a university committee and advisor, and in all cases, doctoral students must have their research questions approved by these members before any research or study can proceed. Members of this board are often persuaded by political circumstances and government policies (which often change, depending upon the leadership in the Ministry of Education). Currently professors and students cannot commence writing about certain topics that may be in violation of a particular understanding of a subject that may change depending on the political and religious persuasions of members of this university board.

³² After the establishment of the Islamic Republic, *mut'a* was advocated as "evidence of Islamic understanding and foresight on matters of human sexuality." Haeri, *Law of Desire*, p. 6.

practice based on a masculine understanding of what female sexuality ought to be, “not in and of itself, but always in relation to male sexuality.”³³ Although published in 1989, this work is still *the* authoritative text on *mut’a* in practice, and by extension, on the discourse of sexuality from the perspective of Shi’a legal and ideological paradigms.³⁴

Since the publishing of *Law of Desire*, there have been a few, albeit vital, contributions from anthropologists and sociologists based in Europe and the United States who study gender and sexuality and integrate fieldwork into their research. They have researched indigenous women’s movements, women’s participation and resistance during the Iran-Iraq war, and social customs and rituals in urban spaces. In this group, I underscore the works of Shahla Haeri, Roxanne Varzi, Shirin Saedi, and Pardis Mahdavi.³⁵ In the past three years, academic debates have stirred over Mahdavi’s controversial claims regarding the sexual practices of a subculture of upper-middle class Tehrani youth, whose customs and attitudes according to her demonstrate the existence of a burgeoning “sexual or sociocultural revolution.”³⁶

For recent and important sociological research in Persian, which pertains to the discourse of the body and sexuality in Iranian society, we have thus far relied on a handful of social scientists based in Iran, namely Soheila Shashahani, Shirin Ahmad-Nia,

³³ Ibid., p. 26.

³⁴ So foundational is this work, that Fatemeh Sadeghi, a political scientist and denizen of Tehran, incorporates Haeri’s discussion of the different kinds of *sigheh* arrangements to bolster her arguments on shifting sexuality discourse of young urban Iranian women in 2006.

³⁵ See Roxanne Varzi, *Warring Souls: Youth, Media, and Martyrdom in Post-Revolution Iran*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2006; Pardis Mahdavi, *Passionate Uprisings* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2009); Shirin Saiedi, “Hero of Her Own Story: Gender and State Formation in Contemporary Iran” (PhD diss., Cambridge University, 2011).

³⁶ Pardis Mahdavi, *Passionate Uprisings*, p. 3.

and Fatemeh Sadeghi.³⁷ (Their research methodology, thesis objectives, and research findings are often scrutinized—for the purposes of being accepted for publication—by officials within Iran’s Ministry of Education and Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance.) There are, additionally, many researchers in the public health sector who have written extensively on prisoner populations, drug addiction, and sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) in Iran for the purposes of acquiring statistical data and analysis.³⁸

Notably Fatemeh Sadeghi³⁹ has explored the discourse of sexuality by examining shifts in sexuality discourse of young, urban Iranian women.⁴⁰ Although observing changes in their private and public lives, Sadeghi attests that these changes do not testify to radical breaks in social conventions of the past. She has however observed the Islamist state’s politicization of sexuality in the second decade of the Islamic Republic, noting, “The Islamist project [in Iran] has been also inclined to homogenize and discipline sexuality on the basis of what is legitimate and illegitimate in the Sharia.”⁴¹ According to Sadeghi, the morality police’s scrutiny of heterosocial relations has replaced the guardianship duties of traditional families in this domain.⁴² Consequently, relations have

³⁷ Professor of anthropology Soheila Shashahani is also credited for her work on representations of the body in addition to her ethnographic contributions of nomadic tribes in Iran, examining issues such as sexual division of labor. Shirin Ahmad-Nia is a professor of sociology who writes extensively on social problems in Iran, yet does not situate these issues within the paradigm of modernization theories of tradition versus modernity. See Soheila Shahshahani, “History of Anthropology in Iran,” *Iranian Studies* 19, no. 1 (Winter 1986): pp. 65-86. See also Shahshahani, “Body as a Means of Non-Verbal Communication in Iran,” *International Journal of Modern Anthropology*, Thought Short Report, 1 (2008): pp. 65-81.

³⁸ I discuss this topic in Chapter Five.

³⁹ Although trained in political science, Sadeghi researches in the field of sociology.

⁴⁰ See Fatemeh Sadeghi, “Negotiating with Modernity,” *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East* 28, no. 2 (2008): pp. 250-259.

⁴¹ Sadeghi, “Negotiating with Modernity,” p. 254.

⁴² Ibid.

become privatized, moving courtship from public spaces to homes and cars, for example. This shift into private spaces has resulted in younger generations participating in a “precocious sexuality.”⁴³

Looming large within this work are writings on space, power, sexuality, prostitution, stigma, and gender that, individually and in conversation with each other, have helped theoretically ground this topic—on the bodily technologies for regulating sexuality— within a global matrix of ideas, persuasions, identities, and desires. One cannot consider the regulation of sexuality without taking into account how flows of capital, labor, technology, information, drugs, and culture impact the implementation and efficacy of certain policies. By examining the construction and strategic application of old, new, and recycled modes of regulation, I observe how each mode is engaged within a matrix of forces where modernity, consumerism, prostitution, and religious doctrine meet and often clash. As a case-in-point, consider Iran’s policy on prostitution. Even though in 1979 prostitution was banned, its criminalization has neither halted the rise in prostitution nor has it prevented the trafficking of women and children in urban areas and across Iran’s borders. Iranian women, for reasons of economic stability and/or because they were forced, are reported to be working as prostitutes in neighboring, oil-rich Gulf states, while women from Afghanistan and Pakistan, are brought to Iran for similar reasons, including escaping war and political upheavals in their own countries.⁴⁴ In this example, economic woes, regional conflicts, exploitation, and covert drug and sex trafficking

⁴³ Ibid., pp. 253-254.

⁴⁴United States Department of State, *2012 Trafficking in Persons Report-Iran*, Refworld-UNHCR website, June 19, 2012, accessed July 12, 2012, <http://www.unhcr.org/refworld/country,,USDOS,,IRN,,4fe30cc0c,0.html>.

circuits have thwarted anti-trafficking legislation and initiatives. Officially, however, government officials downplay or even deny the problem even though there has been a push among certain clerics to bring prostitution into quasi-legitimate status within an Islamic legal paradigm.

In the Islamic Republic of Iran, the discourse of prostitution has been traditionally and uniquely couched in Shi'a ideological frames of reference. At the same time, the role and figure of the prostitute has featured in Iran's nationalist rhetoric on reform, hygiene, maternity, citizenship, and health throughout the last century. For the Pahlavi state, the regulation of prostitution involved policing prostitutes' behavior and not their clients. Many prostitutes were quarantined in red-light districts under both police protection and Ministry of Health supervision as preventive measures to curb the spread of STDs. Two days before Ayatollah Khomeini's return from exile on February 1, 1979, Tehran's red-light districts were set ablaze; by month's end, provisional revolutionary courts outlawed prostitution and ordered the demolishing of brothel sites. Even still, as mentioned above, prostitution continues to be a pressing domestic and international issue for the Iranian government and clerical leadership.

In many countries around the globe, prostitution is an extremely controversial subject, stirring many debates on sexual exploitation and appropriate government response —specifically, whether or not to condemn or rehabilitate prostitutes.⁴⁵ In India, many NGO advocacy groups have pushed for the legalization of prostitution to circumvent the spread of AIDS and other STDs and to eliminate the role of middle men. In the Netherlands, prostitution is accorded legal sanction in an effort to curb the

⁴⁵ Belinda J. Carpenter, *Re-thinking Prostitution: Feminism, Sex, and the Self* (New York: Peter Lang Publishing, New York), p. 28.

exploitation of sex-workers; policies towards prostitution have been traditionally guided by a “positive, tolerant and open attitude regarding sexuality,” says Ine Vanwesenbeeck.⁴⁶ In Mexico, prostitution, which is an urban phenomenon, is tolerated and unregulated. As understood by Rosario Esteinou, this is the case because prostitutes are viewed as necessary and useful to society, for they provide “a sexual outlet for lustful men, thus protected decent daughters and wives.”⁴⁷

According to Belinda Carpenter, “for western feminists, prostitution seems to engender some of the most difficult, and yet central issues of feminism.”⁴⁸ There are many levels of tension, regarding the victimization of prostitutes or their empowerment.⁴⁹ There are also debates focusing on the elements of choice, economic stability, geography, culture, deviant behavior, promiscuity, pleasure, among many others, in determining the negative or positive analyses of prostitution and sex work, and the people involved in it.

By investigating and tracing the shifts, gaps, and continuities in regulatory policies on prostitution, one discerns the salient tensions preoccupying state, clerical and popular discourses on sexuality. One demonstrable tension is a demarcation of normative from abnormal human behavior, impacting both the Shi’a ideological and popular

⁴⁶ Ine Vanwesenbeeck, “Sex Workers’ Rights and Health: The Case of the Netherlands,” in *Global Perspectives on Prostitution and Sex Trafficking: Europe, Latin America, North America, and Global*, ed. Rochelle Dalla, Lynda Baker, John DeFrain, and Celia Williamson (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2011), p. 20.

⁴⁷ Rosario Esteinou, “Selling Bodies and Sexual Exploitation: Prostitution in Mexico,” in *Global Perspectives on Prostitution and Sex Trafficking: Europe, Latin America, North America, and Global*, ed. Rochelle Dalla, Lynda Baker, John DeFrain, and Celia Williamson (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2011), p. 126.

⁴⁸ Carpenter, *Re-thinking Prostitution*, Introduction.

⁴⁹ Donna Sabella, “The Identity of Prostitute Women,” in *Global Perspectives on Prostitution and Sex Trafficking: Europe, Latin America, North America, and Global*, ed. Rochelle Dalla, Lynda Baker, John DeFrain, and Celia Williamson (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2011), pp. 184-185.

conceptualizations of sexuality and the men and women involved in prostitution—who enter by choice or by force.⁵⁰ Are prostitution and other forms of sex work considered deviant work? Is there a conceptual space for such practices to be conducted and accepted? What positive ideals are emphasized to ensure that men and women embrace regulatory policies on their sexuality, health, and social relations, subsequently internalizing these ideals? Moreover, how do women perceive, experience, and confront these bodily technologies and its impact—especially in cases when they encounter additional discrimination and stigmatization because of government regulation?

Interventions and Methodology

As both a contribution to and an intervention in the study of gender and sexuality within the discipline of Iranian studies, this dissertation traces how sites and modes of regulation mutate into each other, breaking form to join with other disciplinary methods to condition a similar kind of isolation, concealment, and stigmatization. At the same time, this dissertation engages with the sites of exclusion—both physical and conceptual—where certain women, such as prostitutes and women living with HIV, are forced to remain in crisis and face societal ambivalence and stigmatization.

This dissertation project necessitated that I consult a diverse collection of primary and secondary sources. Moreover, in order to ground my analysis of the material, I conducted sociological fieldwork in Tehran over a five-year time period, between 2006-2011. Before expounding the interview methodology for this project, I will first explain the sources I examine. For the project, I analyze magazine articles, photographs, and

⁵⁰ Shannon Bell, *Reading, Writing, and Rewriting the Prostitute Body* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994), p. 2.

official portraits published since the mid-1960s, when Iran underwent modernization reforms under the second Pahlavi regime (1941-1979). I also analyze official and government-funded reports, including Ministry of Health documents on prostitution living conditions from 1969. I survey pamphlets on the subjects of breastfeeding, STDs, and human sexuality. In addition, I review the Islamic Republic's policies on modesty, clothing, and veiling, as well as scour articles and images in women's journals and fashion magazines that were popular in the past forty years (e.g., *Zan-e Rouz* and *Ettela'at Banevan*). I also review ministry and media programs on women's health, sexual education, and HIV/AIDS. Finally, I examine the speeches and writings of religious officials—some of whom have held or presently hold leadership positions in government—to supplement the extant literature on policies of compulsory *hejab* and “Islamic modesty,” as well as the writings on the subject of human sexuality from high-ranking Shi'a *ulama*.

The ethnographic section of this dissertation includes four in-depth interviews with Iranian women, who offered their opinions about individual bodily perceptions and even provided interesting commentary about their daily experiences, relationships histories, and health practices. I include this valuable ethnographic material not only because it provides useful information on diverse interpretations of sexuality and sexual practices, but also because it illustrates the very complex construction of and experiences with social custom, identity, personhood, and power in contemporary Iran. Indeed, I was awed by the magnitude of their accounts and the diversity of viewpoints I encountered. The immediacy and potency of these individual accounts, which expressed personal

navigations around the Islamic Republic's "red lines," were invaluable in my attempts to, as Marnia Lazreg states, "explode the constraining power of categories."⁵¹

The selection of interview participants was based on their interest, comfort, availability, safety, and willingness to answer my questionnaire. To find willing participants, I relied on word-of-mouth, private and professional contacts, and the snowball effect, whereby previous interviewees suggested to me other women who would like to be interviewed for this study. Before commencing this project, I was certain that I knew enough female participants to approach for an initial interview, as I had many contacts in Tehran and have lived and worked, intermittently, in Iran since 2003.

Most of these interviews were conducted in Tehran—save three interviews in the neighboring suburb of Kharaj. Each interview took about thirty to forty-five minutes to complete, as discussion often segued into tangential topics. Interviews were conducted in private homes and offices. I interviewed Persian-speaking women whose ages ranged from eighteen to eighty-five. I spoke with women from across the socioeconomic and religious spectrum—from high-society housewives to women who travel three hours to clean their homes; from the very pious to the nonreligious. I interviewed secretaries, physicians, office workers, researchers, lawyers, accountants, nurses, social workers, students, and professors. I spoke with clothing shop managers in Haft-e Tir Square about the government and morality police's policies on mannequins. I discussed HIV-related issues with social workers, researchers, and medical professionals. In total, I interviewed 81 women about body perception and breastfeeding experiences, touching on issues of

⁵¹ See Marnia Lazreg, "Feminism and Difference: The Perils of Writing as a Woman on Women in Algeria." *Feminist Studies* 14, no. 1 (Spring 1988): pp. 81-107.

sexuality, marital relations, modesty, and health. Of the 100 persons I originally sought to interview, ten were men.

Throughout the interview process and thereafter, I considered and respected the participants' individual sensitivities to their reputation, honor, family, social status, and political affiliation. I vowed to not disclose any personal information and anecdotes that would jeopardize their safety and/or make them feel discomfort. I took every possible step to safeguard the women's identities and answers. For those interviewees who granted me permission to record our conversations, after the interviews, I quickly transcribed them and erased the encrypted files. I also altered their names in the transcriptions.

For the majority of participants, I asked them the same twenty-two questions in a semi-structured interview format.⁵² The questions were printed in a questionnaire, which I handed out to each participant before each interview. The question set provided me with an open framework to consult as I followed topical trajectories in our conversations. These questions covered topics of motherhood, health awareness, and breastfeeding practices. In certain cases, I was not permitted to ask specific questions due to security and personal reasons—which I discuss in depth in the relevant chapter. (During the interviews, I avoided political subjects related to the regime and the domestic economic crisis.) For each female participant, I asked, for example, “What is your opinion of your body?” or “In your opinion, what do you imagine or feel about the male or female body?”

As a way to both clarify and focus the interviews, I asked women specific questions about their breastfeeding experiences, asking them to comment on their

⁵² For some of the interviews, I asked them an additional eight questions, which were related to breastfeeding practices. Not all of the women I interviewed had experienced nursing a child.

perceptions of their breasts. I also inquired about their personal health maintenance, a topic that compelled some of them to recall stories on intimate encounters and to explain their feelings towards their spouses. I found that the concept and topic of breasts served as a common denominator for the majority of women, generating stories of intimacy, sensuality, pain, marital relations, motherhood, and childhood memories. It elicited a variety of anecdotes, many of which revealed a woman's particular understanding of her self-worth, personal relationships, and desires. Plus, it served as a good conversation starter for, as I mentioned earlier, mannequins' breasts were being sawed off and then displayed in window shops throughout the city.

At this point, it is useful to expound the chapter divisions of this dissertation.

Synopsis of Chapter Divisions

In *Staging a Revolution*, Hamid Dabashi and Peter Chelkowski suggest that the Islamic Revolution of 1979 was “in full semiotic control of the representation of itself.”⁵³ According to images produced by active organs of the opposition, a new political reality had taken shape. Pictures began to “talk” of dissent, of people's mobilization against the Pahlavi regime. Chapter One, “Breasts, Hands, and Faces: Gazing at Iran's Mediascape,” discusses the methods of “semiotic control” that originate in the mid-1960s, encouraging Iranian women to become modern citizens. This chapter traces how Iranian women and their bodies are represented through the processes of first, modernization and second, Islamization. This chapter analyzes a selection of recurrent and illuminating drawings and advertising images from *Zan-e Rouz*, a women's weekly

⁵³ Dabashi and Chelkowski, *Staging a Revolution: The Art of Persuasion in the Islamic Republic of Iran*, p. 9.

magazine published from the late Pahlavi era (1966-1979) until the present day. *Zan-e Rouz* was once the popular soapbox of the Pahlavi royalty, advertising consumerism and modern lifestyles until 1979-1980, when it was re-launched as a lifestyle magazine catering to Muslim women supportive of the Islamic government.

Through the comparison of different images of women photographed in various domestic and public settings in both versions of the magazine, what becomes evident is the continuity in the modes of regulation. In each version, the advertising of specific body types and lifestyles are fundamental to the reform of Iranian women, be she a citizen of Pahlavi Iran or of the Islamic Republic. Each attempt to culturally transform women into boundary-making objects of the Iranian nation —be she a westernized, modern woman or a veiled, pious daughter of the Islamic Revolution— was based on the expectation that women would be naturally receptive to reform. Female sexuality occupies a pivotal role in both of these characterizations. Either through the process of sexualization or de-sexualization, a woman is instructed how to behave, act, and relate to others. Chapter One identifies how this method of cultural reform was also a form of regulation —one that was re-codified by government officials and media institutions in the Islamic Republic to promote the values of modesty, family, and piety to Iranian women.

The next two chapters move the reader to a two-part exploration of the discourse of prostitution in Iran, analyzing the role of the prostitute in satiating male sexual desires from the Pahlavi period to the present-day Islamic Republic. Chapter Two “Red-lights in Parks: A Social History of Park-e Razi” investigates the inner dynamics and spatial transformations of a red-light district in southern Tehran, which was once a societal landmark called the “citadel” of *Shahr-e No*. During the Pahlavi years (1925-1979), it

operated quite openly as a government-regulated brothel district. In 1979, it was demolished and later developed into a large family park, *Park-e Razi*. Before its transformation, government health reports and interviews with patrons and social workers familiar with this space verified the vibrant activities inside *Shahr-e No*. When the area was under threat of fire, a popular Shi'a cleric even came to its defense, insisting that prostitution played a necessary role in society— similar to that of a toilet in a house. This comment is prescient in that it intimated what would necessarily transpire following the sex district's destruction and despite the site's cosmetic conversion. Prostitution is still an ongoing problem, according to government and park officials and patrons of *Park-e Razi*, where transactions for paid sex are arranged on the park's premises.

Chapter Two explores the social history of this site, when it was once a century-old red-light district. Key figures in *Shahr-e No*'s history, such as brothel madams and high-level clerics and politicians, are highlighted, along with the shifting inequalities and interactions of this space. Special attention is paid to the network of gender and labor relations, in the historical setting of Iran's development into a modern nation-state, ruled by Pahlavi monarchs. The movement from brothel district to park is treated not as a moment of rupture, but one of transition, whereby the practices and conduct of that site remain the same, despite its reconstruction into a different form. By outlining the social and historical processes of this space, the reader arrives at the entrance of a much larger debate over the role of prostitution and the expectation of female sexuality. These issues are engaged in the following chapter and are accompanied by a discussion on the social realities of prostitution and temporary sexual arrangements in contemporary Iran.

Chapter Three, “Post-revolutionary ‘Prostitution’ and its Discontents” returns to the site of *Shah-re No* and begins with the criminalization of prostitution in 1979. Despite being banned, prostitution appears to have increased under the policies of the Islamic government. This is attributed, in part, to several shifts in the official position towards prostitution in moments of economic crisis and in the midst of postwar rehabilitation. It is also due, in large part, to the patriarchal, heteronormative assumptions held by Shi’a *ulama* about male sexuality. During the first two decades of the Islamic Republic, to solve the problem of high unemployment, a rise in the number of unmarried veterans, and the anxiety of unbridled sexual activity among the youth, government officials began suggesting that Iranians enter *sigheh* arrangements (temporary marriage in Shi’a Islam). *Sigheh* is interpreted legally to be a morally acceptable means to satisfy men’s sexual appetite. The *ulama* justify this practice on the basis of human nature, which they explain is a man’s uncontrollable sex drive that should be contained so as to prevent social disorder.⁵⁴ By publicly endorsing *sigheh*, officials proposed a religious framework to control prostitution —meaning that prostitution and prostitutes are accommodated into the framework of Islamic marriage. This unique method of regulation contrasts how prostitution was controlled during the Pahlavi era, when districts like *Shahr-e No* were supervised by the Ministry of Health and guarded by the police. From criminalization to regulation, the change in policy enables the “sites” of prostitution to mutate and thus be absorbed by other spaces and paradigms. Subsequently the concept of *sigheh* expands in definition from a temporary contract between a man and an unmarried woman for the purposes of satisfying sexual urges, to a temporary contract between a client and a

⁵⁴ Haeri, *Law of Desire*, p. 64.

prostitute. Many critics have interpreted this expansion in definition and usage of *sigheh* as a religious justification for the practice of prostitution.

The penultimate Chapter Four, entitled “Naked Modesty and the Reformation of Statues in Post-revolutionary Iran,” explores the regulatory methods of erasure and modification through the handling of artistic representations of women under the Islamic Republic. Hard-line supporters of Ayatollah Khomeini have deemed statues depicting the human body (which were erected in major squares and in front of municipal buildings) as immodest and contrary to Iran’s revolutionary, Islamic norms and principle. Subsequently, many of these objects were subject to reform or destruction in accordance with new policies on modesty and *hejab*. The removal and/or modification of statues depicting women illustrate the great lengths to reconfigure public space as a sexually-regulated and modest setting. As concrete examples, this chapter highlights the modification of select public monuments, landmarks, artworks, and mannequins in Tehran. These cases illustrate not only the precarious process of reform, but also how public space is re-designed to express and reinforce positive “Islamic revolutionary values” in the face of growing domestic opposition and the pressure of global forces, such as the Internet and consumerism.

The fifth and final chapter, “HIV/AIDS and the Problem of ‘Taboos’ Talking,” is the last site of inquiry for this dissertation project, exploring the experiential side of bodily technologies from the perspectives of Iranian women living with HIV. Qualitative studies, opinion pieces, and government reports testify that this particular health diagnosis is regarded as a social taboo; as such, HIV-positive women encounter major stigmatization. Many choose not to disclose their health status for fear of losing their

jobs, families, friends, and medical care. For many HIV-positive women and their children, there are enumerable impediments that retard efforts to provide and improve medical care and treatment. In Iran, public health efforts to meliorate the living conditions and health care of HIV-positive women are in a nascent stage. This predicament means that those who carry the virus face a particularly unique dilemma: how to break down a social taboo when one is generally perceived to be the physical manifestation and carrier of that taboo.

Chapter Five is divided into two parts. The first section is a historical overview of HIV/AIDS discourse in Iran, situated at the intersection of state, religious, and public domains. The second part is the ethnographic section, wherein I include interviews, commentaries, and analyses from fieldwork conducted in 2010 and 2011. Among the many women I interviewed, I spoke at length with several women living with HIV, all of whom were members of a HIV-positive support group for mothers and widows based in Tehran. Their reflections on their bodies, life experiences, health status, social circles, families, sexuality, and medical care illustrate individual negotiations of a stigmatized health status while overcoming and maintaining the usual pressures, joys, challenges, and interests of almost any woman living in Iran.

Indeed, the scope of practices, methods, and technologies used to regulate and experience sexuality in contemporary Iran are manifold and diverse, conflictive and collaborative, and seldom reflective of the state's ideological imperative of an "Islamic sexual morality." This dissertation is an intervention in the current debates on the discourse of sexuality in modern Iran, examining specific regulatory methods—their

design, implementation, target audiences, continuities and shifts in content and usage, and social histories behind these disciplinary technologies since the mid-1960s.

In discussing the bodily technologies for regulating sexuality, one sees the extensive network of government “red lines” being formed and tested. In this process of inclusion and exclusion, those objects and persons considered deviant, taboo, immodest, and obscene are constantly being reformulated, readjusted, and redefined.⁴ The state’s tendency, via its public policy and morality campaigns, has designated the human body (and its representations) as something shameful. The isolation of certain body parts as taboo, in particular those belonging to women, has undoubtedly led to three outcomes: certain bodies go into hiding; they become absent; or they resort to a kind of mutilation. In the forced excavation of immorality, indecency, and immodesty that had allegedly plagued the pre-revolutionary body/place dynamic, women’s bodies became the overt expression by which an Islamist state would commence its disinfection or *paksazi* or cleansing process. This means that moral jurisdiction of the state designates which bodies are clean, pious, favorable, and worth memorializing. This also means that whatever potency the state possesses can be administered through vast manipulations and erasures of the public (social) memory, the public (social) body and the private (physical) body. Thus “bodies,” in their many states of representation, compliance, and resistance, can be physically and publicly forgotten through legal and extra-legal policies, structures, development, destruction, and, moreover, compulsory forgetting.

CHAPTER ONE

Breasts, Faces, and Hands: Gazing through Iran's Mediascape

Figure 1

Introduction

In the theater of Iran's rapid modernization program, known as the White Revolution, almost anything was subject to reform.³⁵ Reforming the state's economic and agricultural infrastructure to the shape of a woman's body, modernization was achievable for both the profane and spiritual. Figure 1 is a perfect example: even the holy month for fasting is updated. Accompanying the article, "Fasting: The Best Regime for Achieving Health and Balance of the Body," it featured in weekly magazine *Zan-e Rouz*'s (Today's Woman) Ramadan special edition, commemorating the Muslim holy month. Does this

pairing of a beauty regimen with fasting, one of Islam's pillars of faith, provoke social and political tensions among readers —especially during the 1970s in Iran? From the article's tone and content, it appears that the presentation of fasting as a method of dieting is a common association —and one openly discussed. "Fasting," the author quips, "is the best medicine for one's struggling with weight gain."³⁶ Written in a first-person narrative, the article's opening sentence reads, "*Man dokhtar-e chaghi hastam*" (I am a fat girl). Following this proclamation, the author informs the reader about fasting rituals across the globe.³⁷

In the accompanying article, fasting is stripped of most of its ritual and spiritual tones and rendered a dieting fad that accommodates the desires of a modern, Iranian woman. For the author's primary assumption is that she is a weight-conscious believer, and as such, dieting during Ramadan is a useful method and opportune moment to slim her burgeoning waistline. For when she fasts, her body physically would improve. The author claims that pimples vanish; the pounds melt off. The skin begins to take on a dewy appearance, potentially shaving five to ten years off the dieter.³⁹ Indeed, by practicing self-restraint, she will learn to eat less and can achieve *ta'adol jesmi* (physical or bodily balance) —the union between her spirit and body. In this way, fasting is articulated as a modern dilemma summed up in this question: what are the physical benefits to fasting during Ramadan? A desirable body.

Thus Figure 1 illustrates this predicament: a woman's struggle in choosing between sweet indulgence and spiritual obligations and rituals. Yet how this message is conveyed is through the author's engagement with certain tropes and stereotypes about femininity, body image, female sexuality, and piety, as practiced by women. These are

disciplinary tactics, encouraging the female reader to reform her physical body for a dual objective: desirability and religious observance.

Upon closer inspection of the drawing itself, these themes become more obvious. Notice the suggestive position in which the female subject—presumably the main character from the article—sits; her body is half covered in what appears to be a prayer *chador*.³⁸ Lush, pinkish hues are contrasted by the dark and light shadows, a visual effect which accentuates her physical shape underneath the cloth. Though the woman's body is not fully visible, its contours are. The viewer's gaze focuses in on her perfectly round breasts; they pop out of her v-neck blouse, held in place by a green garnet nestled between them. Hovering behind her is a portrait of a bearded guru, ostensibly in meditative pose. He sits in the center, above her, as an ideal guide for her spiritual self. She is also flanked on both sides by two different vices. Edible desires linger in the background to her left; to her right, there is an open room to serenity, illustrated by snowcapped mountains perching over valleys. In this scene, the projection of edible desires is mixed into a sexually suggestive piety.

Indeed, the overall depiction of this woman implies that beneath any Muslim-Iranian woman's *chador* is the voluptuous body of a believer. More so, her representation as being simultaneously open, sexually suggestive, desirous, and religiously observant does not appear to be problematic—given the subject and target audience, offensive to pious Muslim women. But fast forward to the 1979 Iranian Revolution; magazine images of this sort are banned, let alone tolerated. In their stead is an iconography of Iranian women as *veiled* Muslim women who are regarded as

“authentic.”⁵⁵ Within two years after the Revolution, women are pictured wearing loose overcoats, trousers, and veils, exposing just their hands, feet, and faces. Photographs and other visual media herald the success of the Revolution, commonly featuring the following visual motifs: wives in domestic settings; grieving mothers of veterans; and militant women marching in demonstrations, clad in *chadors*, “with their hands held high in exhortation.”⁴⁰

This revolutionary period in Iran’s modern history is analyzed as a watershed moment animating drastic political, economic, and social changes. It is often defined as a time of great historical ruptures, exemplified by the return from exile of charismatic Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini (1902-1989), who upon his return to Iran took the helm of a popular movement against the inaccessible, pro-Western dictator Muhammad Reza Shah Pahlavi.⁵⁶ Once revolutionaries secured control of state institutions and commenced the project of institutionalizing Khomeini’s doctrinal concept of *veyalat-e faqih* (Guardianship of the Jurists), some scholars have regarded this period as a breakaway point from Iran’s modern course—from the progressive, liberal initiatives of the Pahlavi state to the radicalism and fundamentalism of an Islamist government run by high-ranking Shi’a *ulama*.⁵⁷

⁵⁵ Paidar, p. 209.

⁵⁶ Paidar observes that the leadership of the anti-Shah movement was fluid and unpredictable, whereby what was initially a revolutionary movement initiated by a small group of secular intellectuals developed into a diverse network of secular and religious members and ultimately by the summer of 1978 narrowed down to the leadership of Ayatollah Khomeini as the highest authority of this movement. See Ibid., pp. 198-200. For more on the diverse anti-Shah opposition and leadership, see Abrahamian (2008), Arjomand (1988, 2010) and Dabashi (2006).

⁵⁷ See Paidar, pp. 224-233. As an example of scholars who concentrate on economic and cultural disruptions initiated by the revolution, see Farhad Nu’mani and Sohrab Behdad, *Class and Labor in Iran: Did the Revolution Matter?* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2006), p. 191. Ali Mirsepassi notes that a “generation of Western scholars” has interpreted the Iranian revolution as “backward looking,” in the framework of the French and British revolutions that are interpreted instead as breaking points between

The same dramatic script documenting epistemic shifts is cast onto the narrative of Iranian women's status after the Revolution, especially with regard to their civil and political rights. Analysts contend that compulsory *hejab* (Islamic head covering), enacted gradually within three years after the Revolution, set in motion the curbing of women's rights and the disciplining of their femininity and sexuality, to the chagrin and protest of many.⁵⁸ During anti-Shah demonstrations, the Islamic *hejab* became an important symbol of resistance to the imported "culture" and a symbol of rejection of Pahlavi values.⁵⁹ Ayatollah Khomeini had designs to reform Iran into an Islamic Twelver Shi'a society with a theocratic government. In this Islamic republic, compulsory veiling was reasoned as a beneficial method of protection for women. For Khomeini insisted, "As for women, Islam has never been against their freedom. It is, to the contrary, opposed to the idea of a woman-as-object and it gives her back her dignity."⁶⁰ Women were thus encouraged to dress modestly if they sought to be respected, honored, and no longer subjected to the objectification they experienced under the Pahlavis.⁶¹

After the successful elimination of political opponents among the anti-Shah opposition movement, Ayatollah Khomeini and his hard-line supporters sought to consolidate their power even further through what Paidar refers to as a "rapid

modernity and tradition. See Ali Mirsepassi, *Political Islam, Iran, and the Enlightenment: Philosophies of Hope and Despair* (London: Cambridge University Press, 2011), p. 164.

⁵⁸ Ziba Mir-Hosseini, "The Conservative: Reformist Conflict over Women's Rights in Iran," *International Journal of Politics, Culture, and Society* 16, no. 1 (Fall 2002): p. 41.

⁵⁹ Paidar, p. 214.

⁶⁰ Ibid. Quoted in Ali Reza Nobari, *Iran Experts* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, Iran America Documentation Group, 1978), p. 13.

⁶¹ Valentine M. Moghadam, "Gender and Revolutionary Transformation: Iran 1979 and East Central Europe 1989," *Gender and Society* 9, no. 3 (June 1995): p. 342.

Islamization” — a strategy intended to “strengthen the Islamic features of society whilst the clergy was in leadership position and popular, and to delegitimize pre-revolutionary secular concepts.”⁶² Since 1981, when the Islamic Republic adopted a constitution intended to foster an “Islamic society,”⁶³ one whose rules were enforced to comply with religious law, certain aspects of social life came under direct supervision of the state.⁶⁴ Arzoo Osanloo writes, “One of the effects of the Revolution was the reinvigoration of Islam in political and social life.”⁶⁵ The process of excising Iran from its predecessor involved a massive campaign of revolutionary, cultural adjustment —ostensibly starting from scratch— by a Khomeini-appointed, cultural revolutionary council which began strategizing how to execute this plan. This extra-judicial organ of the state, known as the Supreme Council of the Cultural Revolution (*Shora-ye Aali’ye Enqelab-e Farhangi*), began shaping the nation’s politics and cultural policies. A priority on this agenda was the creation of an “Islamic social infrastructure” to ensure the “continuation of the Revolution at home and abroad.”⁶⁶ A key objective of this committee was to guide Iranians on how to become better Muslim citizens; to achieve this, new norms of sociability, translated as modesty in dress, speaking, and lifestyle, were made transparent to the Iranian public. State policies began to reflect the notion that “women were the markers of the boundaries of the Islamic community and the makers of Islamic

⁶² Paidar, p. 231.

⁶³ Kashani-Sabet (1999); Amin (2001).

⁶⁴ See Mehrangiz Kar, “The Invasion of the Private Sphere in Iran,” *Social Research* 70, no. 3 (Fall 2003): pp. 829-836.

⁶⁵ Arzoo Osanloo, *The Politics of Women’s Rights in Iran* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009), p. 16.

⁶⁶ *Islamic Republic of Iran Constitution*, Preamble, “The Form of Islamic Government.”

identity.”⁶⁷ An ideal, Islamic image of womanhood emerged from this discourse, modeled on the lives of iconic women in early Islam, such as Fatimeh al-Zahra (daughter of the Prophet Muhammad), and representing Iranian women as pious, modest, and self-sacrificing mothers and wives.⁶⁸ Parvin Paidar notes, “Women were constantly reminded by Islamic leaders of their duty to society and the Revolution and warned against taking their motherhood role lightly.”⁶⁹

In order to carry out this policy, several disciplinary techniques were employed by state authorities in order to transform Iranian society. For example, the criminalization of gender relations and the regulation of sexuality via ordinances of sex segregation and compulsory *hejab* became two facile, albeit contentious, methods by which to implement the Islamic Republic’s ideological imperative of an “Islamic sexual morality.” Moreover, the parameters of male and female relations were outlined in accordance to religious and Shi’a legal commentaries on family, marriage, sexuality, and kinship. Notably, one month after his return from exile, in March 1979, Khomeini issued a series of decrees, one of which encouraged and later obliged women to behave and dress in ways that were consonant with the Islamic Republic and its values of faith, piety, revolution, and

⁶⁷ Ibid., p. 232.

⁶⁸ Saeed Rahnema and Haideh Moghissi “Clerical Oligarchy and the Question of ‘Democracy’ in Iran,” Iran Chamber, 2001, accessed 25 July 2011, http://www.iranchamber.com/government/articles/clerical_oligarchy_democracy_iran.php. Zohreh T. Sullivan explains: “Gradually, as evidenced by the writings of Khomeini and Motahari, all differences withered into a single truth: the only acceptable woman in the Islamic state was the Muslim woman who was the ‘pillar of family,’ and who abided by all the laws laid down in the *shari’a*, who would accept the misogynist gender coding prescribed for her by the new government’s version of Islam.” See Zohreh T. Sullivan, “Eluding the Feminist, Overthrowing the Modern? Transformations in Twentieth-Century Iran,” in *Remaking Women: Feminism and Modernity in the Middle East*, p. 233. See also Elaheh Rostami-Povey, “The Women’s Movement in Its Historical Context,” in *Women, Power and Politics in 21st Century Iran*, eds. Tara Povey and Elaheh Rostami-Povey (London: Ashgate Publishing, Ltd., 2012), p. 25.

⁶⁹ Paidar, *Women and the Political Process in Twentieth-Century Iran*, p. 323.

motherhood.⁷⁰

In the spirit of Hamid Dabashi and Peter Chelkowski, who delve into the rich iconography of the Iranian Revolution in *Staging a Revolution: The Art of Persuasion in the Islamic Republic of Iran*, I too follow the visual images and symbols of this historic period. My research however navigates different territory: tracing the pictorial representation of Iranian women fifteen years prior to the Iranian Revolution into the transitional years of the Islamic Republic through the editorial and visual transformations of a popular, Iranian women's magazine, *Zan-e Rouz*. The question pervading this chapter is, did the 1979 Revolution mark the cessation or continuation of certain bodily technologies for regulating women—their sexuality, in particular—as a method of both reform and discipline?

In this first chapter, I have chosen a selection of typical and illuminating images from the late Pahlavi era (1966-1979) and the current regime of the Islamic Republic. Some of the images are informational, propagandist, comedic, consumerist, and pop cultural in nature. In this study, I contend that what was arguably a transformative moment in the conceptualization and re-imagination of the Iranian female citizen—from the alleged consumerist, sexualized specimen of Western deviance of the Pahlavi years to a post-revolutionary de-sexualized, pious, genderless yet maternal woman—was, in fact, *not* so transformative. How women's sexuality and femininity came to be regulated and desired in the policies and visual imagery of the Islamic Republic bore striking similarities to how they came to be reformed, disciplined, and conceptualized during the

⁷⁰ Ibid. These values are outlined in the Preamble and “General Principles” sections of Iran's Constitution, specifically the first four articles. See Islamic Republic of Iran Constitution, amended July 28, 1989.

Pahlavi years. Identifying both unique *and* similar modes of regulation to corroborate this “un-transformative trajectory,” so to speak, is this chapter’s purpose.

In emphasizing this non-transformative process, I discuss the state enterprise of transforming women and their bodies into malleable, consuming objects that require radical change —whether by a “westernized” public culture during the Pahlavi regime or by Islamist ideology in the Islamic Republic. In this chapter, I document how this notion commenced well before 1979 and manifest, as a disciplinary technology, through the shaping and re-shaping of women’s desires, interests, and femininity during the Pahlavi era.

Alongside modernization reforms initiated by Mohammed Reza Shah in the 1960s came the flourishing of a revolutionary and forceful visual culture. Through the development of the celluloid and advertising industry in Iran and the proliferation of color-magazines targeted to female audiences, Iranian women were given visual proof of the sheer possibilities of being and looking modern. Yet pivotal to women’s acceptance of modernization was their education in its style and content: from fashionable hairstyles and appropriate hand gestures while smoking to household chores and perfection of marital responsibilities, women were instructed how to “better” themselves through their caricatures and articles that appeared in *Zan-e Rouz*. By these means, the state succeeded in imposing a species of disciplining women’s bodies through their reform.

After the Revolution, the same notion —that women would be immediately receptive to reform by both public culture and ideology— was circulating despite remonstrations to their implementation.⁷¹ As Iran’s newly drafted constitution spoke of

⁷¹ I discuss these remonstrations in detail in Chapter Four.

“drawing inspiration from the revolutionary and fertile teachings of Islam...to [raise] the level of ideological awareness and revolutionary consciousness of the Muslim people,” great steps were taken to introduce and institutionalize Ayatollah Khomeini’s doctrine of Islamic government to the Iranian public, of whom a large percentage were unaware as to how this would manifest as state policies.⁷² What resulted, in part, was the formulation and implementation of ordinances and public statements on model citizenship that reflected what were loosely defined “Islamic values.” Through the state’s emphasis of modesty, sex segregation, appropriate attire in public space, and the sanctified family unit, state policy had a direct and fundamental impact on the lives and lifestyles of many Iranian women.⁷³

Looking to primary visual sources on the representation of women in a popular women’s magazine published between 1966 and 1986, I sought evidence of the transformations and subtle shifts in the above-mentioned “revolutionary consciousness”-raising of the Iranian people. In both periods, many of the images I analyze convey a unitary conceptualization of women as abstracted, sexualized, consumerist, and desirous. In fact, under both regimes, women are depicted as identifiable personality types ready for legal, educational, consumerist, and cultural reforms. In many instances, women were encouraged to accept the novel shaping of their bodies and the overhauling of their

⁷² “Preamble,” *Constitution of Islamic Republic of Iran*. For information on Khomeini’s unique appropriation of Shi’i concepts and borrowed ideas from Third World populism, see Ervand Abrahamian, *Khomeinism: Essays on the Islamic Republic* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), p. 17. After the overthrow of the monarchy, a national referendum on the question “Islamic Republic: Yes or No?” was held in March 1979. Almost 98 percent responded “yes,” even though the ballot did not explain the definition of the terminology “Islamic Republic.”

⁷³ See Lois Beck and Guity Nashat, eds. *Women in Iran from 1800 to the Islamic Republic* (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 2004); Paidar (1995); Haleh Esfandiari, *Reconstructed Lives: Women and Iran’s Islamic Revolution* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997); Mahnaz Afkhami and Erika Friedl, eds., *In the Eye of the Storm: Women in Post-revolutionary Iran* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1994).

interests and identifies as prerequisites to their entrance into a “better life.” This undertaking was initiated, defined, and refined through collaborative efforts of state institutions, with varied assistance from editorial boards of major magazines, to communicate the message of progress, reform, and ideology for a wide audience. One such magazine that contributed to this enterprise in both the Pahlavi era and transitional years after the establishment of the Islamic Republic was the influential women’s magazine *Zan-e Rouz*.

A Brief History of Zan-e Rouz

The year 1966 marked *Zan-e Rouz*’s inaugural year of publication, when the weekly entered the panoply of print publications targeting female audiences and showcasing Iran’s modern course.⁷⁴ The founding of *Zan-e Rouz* was closely tied to the auspicious growth of *Kayhan* (The Universe), an evening paper, which later became a

⁷⁴ *Zan-e Rouz* was not Iran’s first women’s magazine. By the time it launched, the women and girl’s magazine *Ettela’at-e Banuvan* was already in circulation, published by the *Ettela’at* publishing house from March 1965 until April 1979. There is a century-old history of the publication of Iranian women’s journals and newspapers that began in the early 20th century. While the Iranian state had yet to channel its resources towards girls’ education and raising female literacy rates—girls’ education did not begin until 1918—wives of the Iranian elite began taking matters into their own hands. In 1910, the wife of a doctor published Iran’s first women’s newspaper, *Danesh* (Knowledge). They established girl-only schools, and began advertising the schools’ openings in magazines specializing in women’s issues. These publications catering to women audiences came on the heel of the Constitutional Revolution, marking the entrance of women’s voices into the political discourse. This period saw the publications of newspapers that soon became subscription-based journals. *Zaban-e zanan* (Mouthpiece of Women), founded by Sediqeh Dowlatabadi, jumped right into debates on trade agreements between Great Britain and Iran, *hejab* and women’s suffrage. Soon, *Jahan-e zanan*, *Alam-e Nesvan*, *Jam-iyat-e Nesvan*, and *Nameh-yeh Banovan-e Iran* entered the world of print journalism, especially after Iran fell under the political control of Reza Shah. In these papers, constitutionalism was less discussed and instead, issues that appealed to women among the provinces increased. Journals began publishing short stories, discussing educational systems and midwifery programs found abroad, and highlighted topics considered gender specific to women—such as child marriage and legal status. See Camron Michael Amin, “Selling and Saving ‘Mother Iran’: Gender and the Iranian Press in the 1940s,” *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 33 (2001): pp. 335-361.

publishing magnate and institute within a span of thirty years.⁷⁵ Both *Kayhan* and *Zan-e Rouz* were the brainchildren of academic Mostafa Mesbahzadeh, a Sorbonne-trained jurisprudence scholar and former senator under Mohammad Reza Shah.⁷⁶ Mesbahzadeh dreamt of turning Iran into a news-making, journalistic tour de force by broadening *Kayhan*'s general audience and training Iranian journalists in European institutions.⁷⁷ In obituaries published following his death in 2006, former colleagues described how Mesbahzadeh had the French-language newspaper, *Le Monde*, in mind when creating *Kayhan*.⁷⁸ Reporting on world news in lieu of just domestic affairs,⁷⁹ *Kayhan* began to expand in a manner that reflected Iran's growing independence from British and Russian interference (in the nineteenth century, both powers divided Iran into spheres of influence

⁷⁵ Amir Taheri, "The Grand Old Man of Iranian Press Passes Away in America," *Asharq alawsat*, December 14, 2006, accessed October 4, 2011, <http://www.asharq-e.com/news.asp?section=7&id=7333>. *Kayhan* was launched between 1942 and 1943. Its former chief-editor Amir Taheri remarked, "Mesbahzadeh was a passionate technophile, always looking for new ways of doing things. Thanks to that passion, in 1974 *Kayhan* became one of the first three newspapers in the world to introduce electronic composition, four colour printing, and satellite transmission of news photos. In many areas of press technology, *Kayhan* was a decade ahead of leading American and European newspapers. Having installed the most advanced printing presses in the country, *Kayhan* managed to win large contracts for producing school textbooks along with dozens of magazines issued by various government departments." Ibid.

⁷⁶ "Bonyangozar-e Kayhan Dargozasht/ *Kayhan* Titan Passes Away," BBC Persian, November 11, 2006, accessed October 4, 2011, http://www.bbc.co.uk/persian/arts/story/2006/11/061125_mf_mesbahzadeh.shtml. Mostafa Mesbahzadeh was the publisher and editor-in-chief, and Amir Taheri replaced him up until 1979, when *Kayhan* formed a new editorial board under the Islamic Republic. The establishment of *Zan-e Rouz* is closely tied to the success Mesbahzadeh was able to achieve in publishing *Kayhan*. Mesbahzadeh is quoted as having said: "We had created a space of freedom when the nation needed it." At his side was the political mentor Abdul-Rahman Faramarzi, an established lawyer and journalist, who took on various advisory and editorial roles while also financing the *Kayhan* project. Mesbahzadeh also turned to friends within the Pahlavi regime—a young Mohammad Reza Pahlavi is reported to have donated approximately \$50,000.00 he borrowed from Queen mother—to finance this venture. See Taheri, "The Grand Old Man of Iranian Press Passes Away in America."

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ "Bonyangozar-e Kayhan Dargozasht/ *Kayhan* Titan Passes Away," BBC Persian.

⁷⁹ *Kayhan* was one of two leading newspapers reporting on world news, along with *Ettela'at*, which is Iran's oldest newspaper since 1926 and still in circulation.

in order to consolidate the position of Iran as a buffer zone between their competing interests.)⁸⁰ Mesbahzadeh sought to cultivate an Iranian newspaper milieu in which Iranian publishers and journalists were no longer under pressure from pro-British and Soviet forces, which at the time were subsidizing the distribution and publication of many of Iran's dailies.⁸¹ *Kayhan* distinctly reported on events important to Iran's ruling constitutional monarchy, which simultaneously led to favorable advertisement for the Pahlavi regime.⁸²

In the midst of the publishing industry's domestic expansion, *Kayhan* evolved into a semi-autonomous publishing company, known as the Kayhan Institute. After the success of *Kayhan*, the Institute subsequently launched a range of magazines that targeted different generations and genders of audiences, in Iran and abroad.⁸³ The English-language newspaper *Kayhan International*, created and based in London, was followed by *Kayhan Varzeshi* (Sport), *Kayhan Farhangi* (Cultural), and *Kayhan Bacheha* (Children).⁸⁴ *Zan-e Rouz* was the last to be launched, focusing on a seemingly under-

⁸⁰ For more on the strategic location of Iran with respect to the preservation of Russian and British interests, see Peter Avery, Gavin Hambly, and Charles Melville, ed. *The Cambridge History of Iran: From Nadir Shah to the Islamic Republic, Volume 7* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), pp. 426-428.

⁸¹ See Haleh Esfandiari, *My Prison, My Home: One Woman's Story of Captivity in Iran* (New York: HarperCollins, 2009), pp. 39-40. During the 1970s, many of *Kayhan*'s employees were *Tudeh* members, including the deputy editor-in-chief. According to Haleh Esfandiari's memoirs, during the 1970s when state censorship had increased, Mesbahzadeh became protective of his staff of editors and journalists. They were under watch by the Shah's secret police SAVAK (*Sazeman-e Ettela'at va Amniyat-e Keshvar*), which had its own censorship office. Mesbahzadeh assisted jailed reporters by paying the salaries of fired journalists. In certain cases, he reemployed them under assumed names.

⁸² Shahpour Ghasemi, "Kayhan Newspaper," Iran Chamber Society, 2006, accessed October 3, 2010, http://www.iranchamber.com/media/articles/Kayhan_newspaper.php.

⁸³ See Annabelle Sreberny-Mohammadi, "Small Media for a Big Revolution: Iran," *International Journal of Politics, Culture, and Society* 3, no. 3, The Sociology of Culture (Spring 1990): pp. 341-371.

⁸⁴ Ghasemi, "Kayhan Newspaper."

represented audience within the general readership of *Kayhan*: Iranian women.⁸⁵ (This business venture into magazines for female audiences proved fruitful. By 1979, the average circulation of *Zan-e Rouz* had reached 250,000 while newspaper *Kayhan* was reported at one million.⁸⁶)

As the benevolent, guiding brother-figure to its lesser-known sister *Zan-e Rouz*, Kayhan Institute offered a ripe gestational space in which the women's magazine would generate itself and find purpose. However, after its unveiling, the editorial direction *Zan-e Rouz* pursued was circuitous. As the next section demonstrates, the editorial board behind *Zan-e Rouz* first identified itself as a journalistic space dedicated to improving Iranian women's social and political status. Yet, within a few issues, the magazine content began to underscore fashion and popular culture, alongside advertisements of different household commodities and beauty regimens. This quick transition is deliberate in the context of a reform-minded Pahlavi leadership. For Iran in the mid-twentieth century is developing itself into a modern, capitalist society, moving away from its agrarian roots and into urban development and economic restructuring via the White Revolution. Images of commodities representing modern Iran —gleaming kitchen appliances, perfumes, makeup, and fashionable European clothes, for instance— are a central aspect of commodity culture; they help construct cultural ideas about modern lifestyle, self-improvement, glamour, and how things “should be.”⁸⁷ Hence in order to cultivate the concept of a “modern Iranian women,” the enterprise of modernization

⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶ Taheri, “The Grand Old Man of Iranian Press Passes Away in America.”

⁸⁷ Marita Sturken and Lisa Cartwright, *Practices of Looking: An Introduction to Visual Culture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), p. 189.

necessarily entailed the reforming of men's and women's desires and interests—in this case, using advertising images and magazine content to construct transformative cultural ideas about a modern woman's manner and style of dress, or her social habits. As a popular magazine under the direct guidance and sponsorship of the Pahlavi state, *Zan-e Rouz* is more than a women's journal. As these next few sections will illustrate, it is both an instrument by which to construct a consumer society, and by which to designate and regulate a novel kind of femininity and sexuality consistent with Pahlavi Iran's paradigm of modernity.

Ronald Inglehart and Wayne Baker note, “Well into the twentieth century, modernization was widely viewed as a uniquely Western process that non-Western societies could follow only in so far as they abandoned their traditional cultures and assimilated technologically and morally ‘superior’ Western ways.”⁸⁸ The Pahlavi regime “promoted a pseudo-modernist orientation that equated Westernization with modernization, and which increased technological, economic, political and cultural dependence upon the West.”⁸⁹ According to the modernization paradigm in which the Pahlavi-era project of reform operated, women had to “become” westernized in order to be more socially desirable and acceptable. The process would necessitate their bodies' submission to particular codes of conduct and styles of dress as an expression of the ideal and modern Iranian women.

⁸⁸ Ronald Inglehart and Wayne E. Baker, “Modernization, Cultural Change, and the Persistence of Traditional Values,” *American Sociological Review* 65, no. 1, Looking Forward, Looking Back: Continuity and Change at the Turn of the Millennium (Feb. 2000): p. 19.

⁸⁹ Sreberny-Mohammadi, “Small Media for Big Revolution: Iran,” p. 344.

Through state-funded apparatuses (such as radio, television, and publishing),⁹⁰ which promoted an upper-class lifestyle, the Pahlavi shahs' new aspirations for a modern, informed Iranian populace seemed achievable —given the state-administered facilitation of “the new mood of a consumption-oriented environment.”⁹¹ With the aid of advertising images and print and broadcast media, the Pahlavi regime sought to emphasize raising Iranians' “social knowledge” to enhance the public's reception of its modernization policies.⁹² To do so would involve an overt collaboration among government, consumerist, and corporate interests.⁹³ Investing in the publishing industry, for example, meant that the Pahlavi government would not only become a substantial source of revenue for magazines, but it would also dictate the limit and scope of their editorial content.⁹⁴ Underlining this union of forces was the threat of financial doom, which bore consequences for news editors and influenced magazine content and editorial direction.

⁹⁰ *Kayhan*, October 4, 1958. Quote in Sreberny-Mohammadi and Mohammadi, *Small Media Big Revolution*, p. 87. “If the origins of Iranian radio lie initially in military control and later as an instrument of political hegemony, television began as private entrepreneurship, a classic multiplier of consumerist modernity, and was only later taken over by the state as an instrument of its modernization project. To discuss the development of television in Iran adequately, it is necessary to describe in more detail the advent of Mohammad Reza Shah to power and the developmentalist orientation that his state would pursue. But first came a hiatus in the strong state, which allowed an opposition to develop.” Ibid., p. 79.

⁹¹ Sreberny-Mohammadi and Mohammadi, *Small Media, Big Revolution*, p. 63.

⁹² Ibid. The shah's emphasis of improving “social knowledge” was first published in *Kayhan*, October 4, 1958. The comment was made during a speech of the Shah, who was praising television broadcasting as a way to train the youth and improve social knowledge; the training details and definition of “social knowledge” were not made explicit.

⁹³ For example, a parliamentary bill permitted a former RCA television representative to establish a television broadcast center based in Tehran, staffed by American directors and an Iranian staff. 1958 marked the inaugural year of this private television system, in which American-formatted programming was initially broadcast. Years later, regional television centers opened up in specialized locations throughout Iran, such as Abadan and Esfahan, known for their economic potential and foreign communities, where advertising could be rather lucrative. The government soon got involved, taking over Sabet Pasal's television monopoly and in 1966, Radio Television Melli Iran commenced broadcasting, the first time a national television network was established. See Ibid., pp. 61-67.

⁹⁴ Esfandiari, *My Prison, My Home*, p. 39.

Haleh Esfandiari recalls this very tension in her memoirs. Reflecting on her tenure as a journalist at *Kayhan*, she writes, “The government was a source of advertising revenue, and it set policies that could affect everything from *Kayhan*’s ability to purchase newsprint abroad to Mesbahzadeh’s considerable land holdings. Increasingly the shah and the government showed less tolerance for even the mildest criticism, and the grip on the media of the emboldened Information Ministry grew tighter.”⁹⁵

Emancipating Women through Shahbanu’s Image

By the mid-1960s the Pahlavi family had initiated both extensive reforms and a countrywide campaign promoting their imperial heritage as successors to dynastic conquerors of Asia Minor from the 6th century BCE.⁹⁶ Shah Mohammad Reza Pahlavi and his third, childbearing wife Farah Pahlavi —“*Shahbanu*” (meaning “Empress,” a Sassanid title), as she was called by the moniker-loving Iranian press— co-opted the majestic narrative of Cyrus the Great, acclaimed hero of the Achaemenid Empire, to promote this royal lineage to the Iranian public.⁹⁷ Abrahamian writes, “[The Shah] declared that Iran was at the gates of the Great Civilization; its future would be more glorious than its past – including the Achaemenid, Sassanid, and Parthian empires; its standard of living would soon surpass that of Europe; it would produce a way of life

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*

⁹⁶ The 1968 coronation ceremony of Muhammad Reza Shah was near Shiraz, Iran—at Persepolis, the ancient capital of the Achaemenid Empire (550-530 BCE). World leaders convened in Persepolis for an ornate celebration of the 2500-year anniversary of Persian monarchy. See Hamid Dabashi, *Iran: A People Interrupted* (New York: New Press, 2007), p. 147. For Ayatollah Khomeini’s criticism of the event, see Dabashi, *Theology of Discontent: The Ideological Foundation of the Islamic Revolution in Iran* (New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 2006), pp. 451-452.

⁹⁷ See Houshang Chehabi, *Iranian Politics and Religious Modernism: The Liberation Movement of Iran under the Shah and Khomeini* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1990); Mohammad Gholi Majd, *Resistance to the Shah: Landowners and Ulama in Iran* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2000).

superior to both capitalism and communism; and indeed within a generation it would be the world's fifth most powerful country – after the USA, Soviet Union, Japan, and China.”⁹⁸ The metonymic association of the modern Pahlavis with ancient Persian kings and their beloved queens, despite the passage of more than a dozen centuries, was recast into a contemporary fantasy of a modern, westernized, and Persian king and queen. Ancient grandeur became contemporized for a female audience through the iconic figure and presentation of Empress Farah, whose daily schedule became news fodder and thus a matter of public concern.

In her tenure as queen, there are many images portraying Farah Pahlavi as loving wife, mother, charity worker, and leader. Unlike her husband, who was often photographed in military regalia, she is pictured wearing modern fashions popular among the elite classes. “The Queen represented the ideal stereotype of the emancipated Iranian woman,” the late historian Parvin Paidar comments, “and, as such, had everything that the Shah desired in a woman. As a woman she was beautiful, feminine and elegant; as a wife she was loyal, subservient and caring; as a mother she was devoted and conscientious. She believed that her prime responsibility in life was looking after her husband and children but her role as the Queen required her to take an interest in extra-familial affairs. She left the serious business of the state in the hands of her husband and took up ‘feminine’ pursuits such as a social welfare, education, art and culture.”⁹⁹

Women's magazines like *Zan-e Rouz* projected her ideational force onto a mass audience. The capture of an intimate moment with Farah Pahlavi inside the palace walls shortened the distance between the monarch and her people. In the pages of this

⁹⁸ Ervand Abrahamian, *A History of Modern Iran* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), p. 131.

⁹⁹ Paidar, p. 149.

publication, both the state and editorial board communicated to its target audience the characteristics of a modern lifestyle, calling attention to Western fashions, motherhood roles, and household responsibilities. Yet, the articulation of modern life was wrapped in women's citizenship duties to the nation-state. Since the Constitutional Revolution (1905-1911), a new formation of the model Iranian citizen was being constructed and subsequently promoted among the country's diverse population of Azeris, Baluchs, Persians, Kurds, and many others.¹⁰⁰ In a modernized Iran, tribal and spousal affiliations would be secondary and tertiary identity markers; instead, women would owe their progress and allegiance to a larger institution, the Iranian state. As I demonstrate in this section, the emancipation of women was attributed to state feminism during the White Revolution; yet, the groundwork for improving women's status was achieved through advertising a different way of dress and behavior, which was believed to help women transition from traditional to modern ways of living.

In its first greeting addressing *Zan-e Rouz*'s readers, the weekly's editorial board praised "Her Majesty the Royal Highness Pahlavi" for inspiring its efforts to elevate women's status:

In this present era when Iranian women face great purpose, with abundance of freedom and equality, they should now endeavor to elevate themselves, their own status, and personal sense of what they should provide for their country. Her Royal Highness Farah Pahlavi is hopeful that this journal, *Zan-e Rouz*, would guide and advise Iranian women to reach their goals. We hope to try, using as much power as we have in this path, to make ourselves proud and honored before the society of Iranian women. Her Excellency *Shahbanu* (Farah Pahlavi) is our greatest supporter in this endeavor.¹⁰¹

¹⁰⁰ See Camron Michael Amin, *The Making of the Modern Iranian Women: Gender, State Policy and Popular Culture, 1865-1946* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2002).

¹⁰¹ *Zan-e Rouz*, Issue 1 (1344/1966) "Introduction."

When this statement is analyzed within its historical and political contexts, there are many messages being communicated about women's status in modern Iran. In addition to the obvious textual messages, there are a number of subtextual messages. First, women are greeted as a collective entity; second, their aspirations are treated as communal, and they are referred to as a "society." Third, *Zan-e Rouz*'s royal ties, especially the queen's approval of their mission statement, are a determining factor in *Zan-e Rouz*'s success as a popular publication. From this brief introduction, it is clear the weekly acknowledges its semi-autonomous status. Explicit is its praise of the freedoms bestowed upon Iran's women, assumedly granted by the monarchical state; absent is any mention of real criticism directed at the Pahlavis. Upon closer inspection, this introductory greeting is also a written pledge in support of Iran's modernization efforts. Evidently, Iranian women are not sufficient as they are; with the assistance of this weekly and the queen, they must also strive to improve their status. Moreover, as the above greeting infers, Iranian women need *Zan-e Rouz* without whose editorial guidance they would conceivably be led astray from their objectives of national service and socioeconomic development.

Becoming modern would also involve cultivating a consumer breeding ground on which both Pahlavi reforms and consumer marketing campaigns could meet a wider Iranian audience. Along with the expansion in radio and television programs and sales, publishing in general and women's magazines in particular were apt forums to advertise Iran's integration of global capital. The language of this integration, however, was in the vernacular of rights and emancipation.

Framing the Queen from Different Angles

In the pre-revolutionary issues of *Zan-e Rouz*, Farah Pahlavi is presented as a fashionable and glamorous Iranian woman. As a publication geared toward women, *Zan-e Rouz* gives access to the pomp and circumstance as well as behind-the-scenes coverage of the life of the Pahlavi monarch. Several issues of the magazine are dedicated to the queen's interaction with the public; in one particular photo spread, the queen is photographed meeting with *chador*-wearing provincial women —her designer outfit contrasting their regional dress. An empress “of the people,” she embodies a majestic, yet approachable persona, and thus through her symbolic figure, the Pahlavi state initiates reforms of Iranian women via her image.

Consider the photographs from Figures 2a and 2b —both taken circa 1966. Figure 2a is a photograph of the inaugural cover page of *Zan-e Rouz*. The same scene is replicated in Figure 2b, yet was shot from another angle and was not published in the magazine. Without any contextual information, the identities of these three subjects are not apparent. For an older generation of Iranians, their identities would be easily recognized. They are in fact former Empress Farah Pahlavi and her young children, Farahnaz and Ali Reza. Absent from this family photograph is a male presence — meaning there is no father or male spouse in the scene's foreground or background. The omission of Muhammad Reza Shah from this portrait reinforces that the central focus of this photograph are the queen and her children. How they are seated, what they are doing, and how they are presented offer an intimate peek not only into royal life but also into how to live as a modern, Iranian family. As the first cover page of *Zan-e Rouz*, it is a provocative illustration projecting the image of perfect domesticity with the Queen

Mother. The image is also an anomaly, for subsequent cover pages feature a variety of models, singers, and cultural icons.



Figure 2a and Figure 2b

Through the photographer's lens, the viewer observes what appears to be a precious moment between the queen Mother and her youngest children. Curiosity encapsulates this scene, evidently set in a family salon or library. While tucked into each other's arms, daughter Farahnaz is photographed sucking her thumb, leaning on her mother's lap while her brother Ali Reza, dressed in a light blue V-neck sweater, sits next to her. The bouffant-haired queen is seated, crossing her bare legs. She holds a book in her lap and appears to be guiding her children through a story. Both children peer into the book's contents as if this is an occasion marking a habitual activity between parent and child. In this moment, the observer learns something important about this particular family —of intimate details of their lifestyle, their familial habits, their interests, and the projection of their modernity.

Positioned next to each other, both images reveal subtle and marked differences in tone, effect, and narrative structure. In Figure 2b, the viewer's central focus is the three

individuals because the photograph is shot at a side-angle; as a result of this positioning, the scene feels more intimate. Additionally, there is more contrast in the black-and-white image; their faces are brighter and the background is darker, creating a heightened, dramatic effect. Because the image is both visually stark and a medium shot, the main characters in this scene are in full frame. The viewer's interest is narrowed, and the shot provides more details about the Pahlavis' facial expressions and gestures.

In both photographs, the queen appears equally engrossed in reading, yet in Figure 2b, she is depicted pointing to something on the book's page. In both images, she wraps her children in her arms, and they seem mutually transfixed, undisturbed by the fact that reading time is being photographed. Figure 2a is a mid-shot of the family, enabling the viewer to perceive more details of the subjects' surroundings. Unlike the dimmed background lighting of Figure 2b—which prevents more details of the setting from being seen— Figure 2a appears to have an equally lit foreground and background.¹⁰² Note the decorative accoutrements enhanced by the color hues: a wooden entertainment center is staffed with books, handicrafts, and vases. To the right of the figures, a fuller view of the TV screen gleams in the background; to the left, several books align the shelves, tilted ever so slightly as if to signal their daily usage and haphazard placement. There is also a sense of balance between foreground and background; the subjects and the setting occupy roughly equal areas in the frame.

¹⁰² In Figure 2b, although there is a television in partial-view in the setting's background, the most pronounced details remain in the foreground, of the Queen and her children.

In *Photography: A Middle-Brow Art*, Pierre Bourdieu analyses the social practice of taking pictures among the French social classes.¹⁰³ He charts the development of photography as a cultural pastime, observing how photography became a structured cultural activity promoting social norms and codes of conduct among the bourgeoisie. Focusing on case studies, he analyzed the way people are positioned in photographs; he argues that their positioning illustrates prestige, nostalgia, and class-consciousness. Bourdieu explains, “The photograph itself is usually nothing but the group’s image of its own integration.”¹⁰⁴ He explains that a photographic image is not an objective illustration of a group of people at a particular event; it has a didactic and instructional purpose: to project an image of social cohesion through a produced collective memory of an event.

In this analysis of *Zan-e Rouz*’s photographs and advertising images, I integrate Bourdieu’s discussion of the staging of characters in photographs to configure how pictures of the queen with her children help cultivate an image of Pahlavi upper-class life and promote to the public its consumerism, fashion sense, and embrace of technology. For example, observe the household objects that surround the queen and her children, which are clearer in Figure 2a. What appear to be decorative accents found in any home library or family salon are, in actuality, luxury goods not yet present in a cross-section of Iranian households. At the time, “media images began to reflect growing foreignness of the physical and social environment, including architecture, clothing, food, social values and mores, and the growing social class divisions of consumption and attitudes,” explains

¹⁰³ See Pierre Bourdieu, *Photography: A Middle-brow Art*, trans. Shaun Whiteside (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1990).

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., p. 26.

Sreberny-Mohammadi.¹⁰⁵ The television, in particular, is a distinguishing feature in this scene; its style is appropriate for the era, but its presence would have been a rarity in Iranian households.¹⁰⁶ Figure 2a can be perceived as an advertisement for the products and comforts of modern-day kingship. Unlike advertisements for household appliances published in newspapers, these images depict the activities and lifestyle of an upwardly mobile royal family. Thus these images carry a unique, ideational force of luxury that, on the surface, is intricately modern, consumerist, intimate, active, and tacitly Iranian. This image also offers instructional cues for Iranian women on the importance of family pastimes in modern Iran. A queen reading to her children is turned into a special event, worthy of a front-page feature. This very image becomes a visual souvenir for mass consumption.¹⁰⁷ As such, the Iranian public peers into her life, observing the idyllic setting of her household. They witness her family pastime, conducted in an orderly, peaceful, and refined setting.

Surveying *Zan-e Rouz*'s Images: Advertising Lifestyles

After surveying all pre-revolutionary issues of *Zan-e Rouz* published before 1979, the first issue is noticeably an anomaly. While the inaugural cover page of *Zan-e Rouz*

¹⁰⁵ Annabelle Sreberny-Mohammadi, "Small Media for a Big Revolution," *International Journal of Politics, Culture, and Society* 3, no. 3, The Sociology of Culture (Spring 1990): pp. 344-345.

¹⁰⁶ See Sreberny-Mohammadi and Mohammadi, p. 62. At the time, owning a television was an extraordinary event that typically Iran's establishment experienced. Television imports to Iran did not commence until 1958. Consumer demand for television sets jumpstarted in the 1950s, with the efforts of entrepreneurial businessman Habibollah Sabet Pasa, who, along with his Harvard-educated son, represented RCA in Iran. Selling receivers to Tehran's elite, he also sold television advertisements to local businessmen, establishing a privatized, television system and, what some have argued, had its own "built-in modernizing potential."

¹⁰⁷ The term "souvenir" is being used in the same manner as Bourdieu, when he describes the "festive moments" as reminders of a cultural, religious, or holiday events; they authenticate past experiences and are reinforce nostalgia. Bourdieu, *Photography: A Middle-brow Art*, p. 21.

extols a quiet, intimate moment of Pahlavi domestic life and motherhood, the second issue follows a different course: depicting fashionable Iran through a non-Iranian cover model. Dressed in brightly-colored, 1960s Western fashions, a light-skinned, green-eyed model appears exuberant and carefree; the image depicts an attachment-free existence. After the first issue, gone is the valorization of pristine, family-centered home-life intimated the previous week.

Given the change in aesthetic direction and feature content, *Zan-e Rouz*'s editorial direction suggests it catered to a small niche of Iranian women's interests. The preponderance of articles emphasizing high society life indicates that its true target audience was in fact Iran's upwardly mobile—the small network of urban elite and aristocratic families with direct ties to the Pahlavi regime. In editions of the magazine from the late 1970s, many of the articles appeal to the interests of this upper class—that, or the desire to promote an upper bourgeois life to the general Iranian public.¹⁰⁸ In one illuminating example, an article describes the societal pressures for Iranian female tourists visiting boutiques in London and Paris.¹⁰⁹ Iranian tourists are depicted as lavish spenders who shop extensively in order to prove, upon their return to Iran, that they could afford luxurious travel—much to the envy of their peers. As a solution, the author suggests that female tourists cut back on their shopping to enjoy sightseeing on their vacations. In no part of the article does the author discuss how infrequent international travel and shopping are for the majority of Iranians.

¹⁰⁸ For explication of the Iranian upper class and the overall politics of uneven socioeconomic development in Pahlavi Iran, see Abrahamian, *Iran: Between Two Revolutions*, especially chapter 9, "The Politics of Uneven Development," pp. 432-435.

¹⁰⁹ *Zan-e Rouz*, Issue 597 (2535/1977), pp. 8-9.

Interestingly, there are a few sections of the magazine that stand out for their recognition of non-elite Iranian women.¹¹⁰ In a short-lived column¹¹¹ asking the opinions of women inside the country about their career interests, lifestyles, and romantic inclinations, nine women are asked sixteen questions about their lifestyle habits and, specifically, their hobbies.¹¹² The grainy black and white photographs of each Iranian respondent contrast the stylized advertisements of the European and American models and actors leaping from the pages. Though some respondents differ in their descriptions of their pastimes—some describe dancing, living simply with their parents, or achieving academically—there is little difference in their descriptions of their hobbies. According to their answers, these kinds of leisurely activities—shopping, entertaining, and beautifying—are ones that the majority of Iranian women share. Thus *Zan-e Rouz*'s content is reflective of this specific audience and its lifestyle preference.

Styling the Body to Achieve Etiquette

By showcasing ads from German and American beauty products and featuring articles on the rising stardoms of actresses Sophia Loren and Elizabeth Taylor, *Zan-e Rouz* positioned itself within in the glitz and glamour of an advertising, celebrity cosmos.

¹¹³ Image and body image awareness are consistently featured in *Zan-e Rouz*'s pre-

¹¹⁰ The photos and their accompanying articles do not seem to be part of a photo spread; nor do they appear to be staged to mimic a particular theme or content.

¹¹¹ This column would only run for eight issues, set in a question and answer style format in which the interviewees' photographs would be displayed on the very top of the magazine page and answers to questions, such as "What is important to you? School? Money? or Love?," are presented underneath each woman's photograph. It is noteworthy that none of the women are pictured wearing veils. See *Zan-e Rouz*, Issue 1 (1344/1966), pp. 32-33.

¹¹² Ibid.

revolutionary days, and sections on beauty and self-improvement are commonplace.¹¹⁴ In the late 1970s, the weekly published numerous articles on the importance of beauty maintenance, body language, and etiquette. Feature articles on hairstyle trends, from the beehive to the bouffant styles, provide *Zan-e Rouz* readers with advice on the most appropriate occasions to wear them.¹¹⁵ Likewise, readers are advised on how to better maintain their skin, via the application of requisite vitamins and creams, to ensure a dewy, youthful appearance.¹¹⁶



Figure 3

Other articles promote beauty maintenance and include diagrams of exact body measurements of the ideal female form, further reinforcing the objectification of women.

¹¹³ See *Zan-e Rouz*, Issue 1 (1344/1966).

¹¹⁴ Ibid., pp. 20-21. In one section in particular, an Austrian hairdresser informs readers how to apply makeup on faces that possess short noses, broad chins, chubby faces, to name a few.

¹¹⁵ Articles on beauty regimen included the maintaining the right hairstyles specific to the shape of one's face and changing one's hair color according to European trends and *Vogue* magazine fashion advice. See *Zan-e Rouz*, Issue 597 (2535/1977), pp. 12-13.

¹¹⁶ *Zan-e Rouz*, Issue 657 (2536/1978), p. 91.

As demonstrated in Figure 3, a color-coordinated diagram accompanied the article “Chic, Beautiful and Cute.” It describes the ideal hand to elbow and waist to buttocks ratios to educate women on the most beautiful body composition and forms.¹¹⁷ A similar article explores different styling techniques, such as dyeing one’s hair color a lighter shade to match the popular European and American styles of the period.¹¹⁸ Additionally, *Zan-e Rouz* integrates advertisements into its articles, showcasing new consumer goods and providing readers with commentary on how these products, from household appliances to new kinds of makeup, tested in homes. What is newsworthy is translated into what sells. Advertisements about bodily improvement—the maintenance of a slim body, as found in Figure 4— demonstrate the simple ways to maintain an attractive form through the purchase of stylish brassieres and undergarments —items that were imported from Europe and America sometime in the mid-1950s.¹¹⁹

¹¹⁷ *Zan-e Rouz*, Issue 638 (2536/1978), p. 24.

¹¹⁸ *Zan-e Rouz*, Issue 597 (2535/1977), pp. 12-13.

¹¹⁹ In my interviews with Iranian women above the age of fifty (which I discuss in Chapter Five), the majority remembered that during their adolescence and young adulthood, they would not purchase already-made undergarments. They preferred instead to seek the services of a local seamstress to sew them customized brassieres.



Figure 4

Joking about Breasts in Caricatures

Previously, I mentioned that the target audience of *Zan-e Rouz* was likely the small population of upper class and aristocratic women. There was, however, an additional audience fundamental to the *Zan-e Rouz*'s mission of emancipating women through style and consumerism—an audience that could not be pinpointed to any demographic of women. It was the heterosexual, male gaze—which was, uncoincidentally, both absent and looming in *Zan-e Rouz* editions from the revolutionary period and beyond.

In pre-1979 issues, the male gaze is not explicitly mentioned in any of the content of *Zan-e Rouz*. Yet, through advertisements on breast and body perfection to joke sections on the seduction of men, its presence is heavily felt. In this pre-revolutionary period, the figure of a woman is assumed to be a desirable object of this gaze. Although Iranian men were not likely included as the target demographic of *Zan-e Rouz*'s readership, pleasing them and understanding what social and beauty norms give them pleasure were being communicated through the magazine's content. Women's bodies are

described as not only receptive to reform, but they also anticipate the male gaze. Once this gaze falls upon their breasts or other bodily parts, the possibilities for sexual arousal and activity between a man and woman increase. I argue that *Zan-e Rouz* editors were cognizant of this dynamic and thus conveyed the modernizing of Iranian women as inclusive of this prerequisite: that Iranian women exhibit a consistent sexual vulnerability and desirability to modern Iranian men.

In a magazine that aimed to present material consonant with the goals of “today’s women,” especially in their desires to improve their social status, there are numerous caricatures of women that promote misogyny by criticizing women’s physical features. In the area of jokes, specifically, the force of the male gaze exerts pressures on women to maintain certain physiques deemed attractive by men. *Zan-e Rouz* includes caricatures that, on the surface, appear to make light of male-female relations yet simultaneously illustrate awkward situations of sexual disappointment between men and women. In many of these caricatures, women’s bodies are the prime target of admiration, shame, ridicule, and desire, and yet there is no expressed critique of their objectification by *Zan-e Rouz*’s development-minded editorial board.

In the following examples, as illustrated in Figures 5 and 6, men’s expectations of women’s bodies are the main themes behind male-female interactions. Breast perfection—manifest by the appearance of ample breasts—motivates male expectations of the perfect, desirable female body and shape. No figure better illustrates this perfection than Figure 1. In fact, Figure 5 is her bosom revealed. Figure 5, a black-and-white caricature printed in 1978, tells a one-scene story about a man’s deflated expectations in the

presence of a naked woman.¹²⁰ In this scene, a portly, middle-aged man appears confused, after entering a bedroom.



Figure 5

In his mind, he envisions the torso of a buxom, naked woman awaiting his arrival. Standing at the doorway, he realizes his illusions contrast what he actually sees. Before him sits a small-breasted woman and her lithe figure; the sight of her deflates his expectations of what he imagines her body to be. Though the woman looks eagerly at him, the expression on his face conveys two stories: the first, of disappointment; the second, of the insignificance of the woman herself. Even in his imagination, he does not envision a full-bodied woman; instead, he expects an ample bosom greeting him in the bedroom.

¹²⁰ *Zan-e Rouz*, Issue 681 (Khordad 2537/June 1978), p. 22.



Figure 6

This focus on breasts is repeated in a caricature found in another issue's joke section. In Figure 6, the narrative is illustrated in two scenes, which are in effect a before and after shot. The caricature is meant to be comical: in one scene, a bespectacled man, dressed in a tuxedo, smiles admiringly at a buxom female. Unlike the male's features, the woman's features are exaggerated in their size and proportion, and her cleavage is partially visible. Her face is nose-less; it features only two doe-like eyes and provocatively pouted lips. Standing in front of each other, the man appears to listen intently, his eyes directed at hers. This intent listening is only strategic. In the adjacent scene, the man, holding a horseshoe magnet in his hand, has successfully exposed what little her clothing covers in the first scene. The magnet's force is so strong that the dress's jeweled pendant pushes her gown forward, revealing her breasts. The magnet only makes visible what one supposes his gaze has already imagined: her erect nipples.

In pre-revolutionary issues of *Zan-e Rouz*, a woman's appearance was just as important as her behavior. The magazine published numerous articles on etiquette, often including instructions on appropriate conduct for social settings where others would observe (and likely judge) women's behaviors. How a woman maneuvers her body, even

in the slightest movement of her hands, is material for observation and analysis. For instance, when hosting a successful dinner party, a woman should project the image of reputable wife and homemaker who excels in the domains of family, cooking, household chores, and etiquette.¹²¹

In another example, long before smoking was considered both a social taboo and public health hazard, *Zan-e Rouz* was advising women on how to decipher the body language of a man or woman holding a cigarette. From the positioning of a cigarette in one's hand, it is possible to extend norms of sociability to an Iranian public. This advice featured in the article "*Chehreh-ye Penhani va Seri-ye Shoma: Az Posht-e Cigar*," as demonstrated in Figure 3.¹²² The author implies that smoking cigarettes expresses a glamorous lifestyle, especially when the hand is extended and its silhouette is elongated by the presence of a slender white stick.¹²³ Yet if the cigarette were held incorrectly, the character of the cigarette owner would be understood and the viewer would have been forewarned.¹²⁴

¹²¹ *Zan-e Rouz*, Issue 1 (1344/ 1966). A section on improving homemaking skills featured in *Zan-e Rouz*'s very first issue.

¹²² "Chehreh-ye Penhani va Seri-ye Shoma: Az Posht-e Cigar," *Zan-e Rouz*, Issue 599 (Aban 2535/November 1976), pp. 18-19. This title roughly translates to "[Getting to Know] Your Hidden and Secret Face: From the Back of a Cigarette."

¹²³ For example, if held in an upright position, this means that the person should be viewed as having a nervous character and is weak. In another example, when the cigarette is held in between the pointer finger and thumb, this means that the person is considered unreliable. *Zan-e Rouz*, Issue 559 (Aban 2535/November 1976), p. 18.

¹²⁴ Iran banned smoking scenes in film and television productions in 2011. Deputy director of the IRIB (Islamic Republic of Iran Broadcasting) urged managing directors of TV stations and film directors to emphasize the health setbacks of smoking). "IRIB Bans Smoking Scenes in Iranian Productions," *Mehr News*, May 1, 2011, accessed September 18, 2011, <http://www.mehrnews.com/en/newsdetail.aspx?NewsID=1226049>.



Figure 7

Transitioning into an Islamic Republic

The association between high-life Tehran and upward mobility led to a grand concealment of the truth —of unsightly slums; of surmounting poverty on the peripheries of modernized reform; and of a dictatorship that eventually thrust Iran towards revolution. By the 1970s, the Pahlavis were the richest entrepreneurial family in Iran.¹²⁵ In the midst of an agrarian reform-driven White Revolution, an oil boom brought a gamut of changes that drastically adjusted the standard of living for many Iranian families.¹²⁶ A village flight from rural to urban sites ensued. Tehran was unprepared for the influx of

¹²⁵ Abrahamian, *Iran between Two Revolutions* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1982), p. 436. The Pahlavis had a vast wealth, partly owning two machine-tool factories, two car plants, two brick-manufacturing companies, three mining firms, three textile mills, and four construction companies. A nephew, Prince Shahram, was a “majority shareholder in eight large companies that specialized in construction, insurance, cement, textiles, and transport.” See Abrahamian, p. 437.

¹²⁶ Ibid., p. 447.

migrants and the housing necessary to settle into metropolitan life. As Abrahamian has noted, “The sudden fivefold increase in the oil revenues inflated people’s expectations and thereby widened the gap between, on one hand, what the regime promised, claimed, and achieved, and, on the other hand, what the public expected, obtained, and considered feasible.”¹²⁷ According to Paidar, “[The Pahlavi regime] had always suffered from a degree of externality to society...[because it] managed to alienate most sections of society as a result of ruling through a combination of authoritarianism, favoritism, and patronage.”¹²⁸

Critique of the Pahlavi regime also focused, in part, on the growing moral and economic degradation of Iran; the modernizing plans of the Pahlavi monarchs were argued to have “ingratiated Iran to Western corporations and had imported a western mode of life,” writes Shirin Deylami.¹²⁹ It was claimed that Iranian society had subsequently become stricken with a western malaise, or “westoxified” (in Persian, *gharbzadeh* or stricken by Western culture).¹³⁰ The issues of women’s presence and roles in society were particularly contentious for certain intellectuals and prominent religious scholars of the revolutionary period. As Valentine Moghadam writes, “The idea that

¹²⁷ Ibid., p. 446.

¹²⁸ Paidar, p. 147.

¹²⁹ See Shirin Deylami, “In the Face of the Machine: *Westoxification*, Cultural Globalization, and the Making of an Alternative Global Modernity,” *Polity* 43 (2011): pp. 242-263.

¹³⁰ See Roy Mottahedeh, *The Mantle of the Prophet: Religion and Politics in Iran* (Oxford: One World, 2000), p. 296. Other translations of *gharbzadegi* are “west-struckeness,” “westitis,” “Occidentosis,” and “Euromania.” The term “westoxified” is translated from the Persian adjective *gharbzadeh*, a descriptive term for a person, culture and identity that has become stricken by Western exploitation, consumerism, and cultural hegemony. Although he did not coin the term, the concept was made popular by modernist writer and intellectual Jalal Al-e Ahmad. According to Said Arjomand, Al-e Ahmad borrowed the terminology from his mentor, a philosophy professor at the University of Tehran, Sayyid Ahmad Fardid. See Arjomand, *After Khomeini*, p. 73.

women had ‘lost honor’ during the Pahlavi era was a widespread one.”¹³¹ The manner and style in which women dressed and behaved in public became scrutinized and thus identified as a typical characterization of a “westoxified” woman. According to Afsaneh Najmabadi, the *gharbzadeh* woman, in particular, “in its crudest form, she was identified with a woman who wore ‘too much’ make-up, ‘too short’ a skirt, ‘too tight’ a pair of pants, ‘too-low-cut’ a shirt, who was ‘too loose’ in her relations with men, who laughed ‘too loudly,’ who smoked in public.”¹³²

Prominent social, literary, and political writer and critic Jalal Al-e Ahmad (one of the few secular intellectuals to be praised by Khomeini¹³³) proposed a cultural alternative to this *gharbzadeh* woman: the concept of a “modern-yet-modest” woman who was unlike the “painted dolls of the Pahlavi regime.”¹³⁴ Al-e Ahmad argued that Westoxification had resulted in, according to Shirin Sedigh Deylami, a “libertine culture of sexuality without developing a juridical and political role for women.”¹³⁵ Although he died a decade before the Revolution, many of his ideas on *gharbzadegi* (Westoxification) were in harmony with those of the leading Shi’a clergy who became increasingly critical of the Shah and Iran’s westernization. Prominent revolutionary ideologues such as

¹³¹ Valentine Moghadam, “Revolution, the State, Islam, and Women: Gender Politics in Iran and Afghanistan,” in *Social Text* 22 (Spring 1989): p. 45.

¹³² Afsaneh Najmabadi, “Hazards of Modernity and Morality: Women, State and Ideology in Contemporary Iran,” in *Women, Islam, and the State*, ed. Deniz Kandiyoti (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1991), pp. 65.

¹³³ Ervand Abrahamian, *A Modern History of Iran* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), p. xvii.

¹³⁴ Paidar, p.168. Quoted in Najmabadi, “Hazards of Modernity and Morality: Women, State and Ideology in Contemporary Iran,” in *Women, Islam, and the State*, pp. 65-66.

¹³⁵ Shirin Sedigh Deylami, “Strangers Among Us: The Critique of Westoxification in Perso-Islamic Political Thought” (PhD diss., University of Minnesota, 2008), p. 50.

Ayatollah Khomeini and Ayatollah Morteza Motahhari, for example, called for a modest direction and more respectful treatment of Shi'a women.¹³⁶

During Reza Shah's reign, Muslim women's modesty—equated with their wearing the veil—was regarded by the state as a sign of national cultural backwardness. Ayatollah Khomeini's Islamic Republic of Iran, however, revered modesty as a marker of resistance against the sexual objectification of women.¹³⁷ Modesty discourse of the Islamic Republic was indeed state-imposed, as Shi'a *ulama* used the language of protecting women from being exploited through by leading them to a morally virtuous path.¹³⁸ Within the purview of Shi'a Islamic thought, modesty is considered a quality of forbearance that believers should aspire to embody and manifest in their appearance, behavior, and reflections. To express modesty does not mean the simple limitation of one's wealth or acquisition of material goods. It also necessarily entails the development of social virtues in trusted human institutions, such as the family. In the *Qur'an*, Motahhari argued, Shi'a women's natural positions were defined by their familial roles, as wives and mothers. Assuming these responsibilities would ensure society's overall well-being and help define men's familial roles, too.¹³⁹ Outside the family domain,

¹³⁶ Although Ayatollah Motahhari (1920-1979) was assassinated in 1979, he is considered the chief ideologue of Islamist groups in the revolution. He forged a friendship with Ayatollah Khomeini in the mid-1940s until his death. Khomeini referred to him as "The fruit of my life" at his funeral. See Dabashi, *Theology of Discontent*, p. 150. In the early 1960s and 1970s he became a prolific writer, penning *The Structure of Women's Rights in Islam* (1978) and a work for which he is most well known, *Causes of Attraction to Materialism* in 1969, wherein he attacks Iranian secular intellectuals and begins to lodge a defense against Marxism. His writings were widely read during the revolutionary period. See Hamid Dabashi, *Theology of Discontent* (New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 2006), chapter 3.

¹³⁷ I discuss the Islamic and state discourses of modesty in Chapter Four of this dissertation.

¹³⁸ See Lila Abu-Lughod, "Modesty Discourses," in *Encyclopedia of Women & Islamic Cultures: Family, Law and Politics*, ed. Suad Joseph and Afsaneh Najmabadi (Leiden: Koninklijke Brill NV, 2005), p. 496.

¹³⁹ For an analysis of Motahhari's main ideas concerning women's roles in family and society, see Paidar, pp. 175-178.

Motahhari argued that the *hejab* was an “important device created to preserve the separation of the sphere of the ‘family’ from ‘civil society’ and it was women’s responsibility to preserve it.”¹⁴⁰

After Khomeini’s clerical followers consolidated power, a massive enterprise in eradicating traces of the westernized government and its network of secular institutions ensued.¹⁴¹ In institutions of the military, government agencies, and mass media, swift changes took place virtually overnight. The new Islamist government purged members of the *ancien regime* and began to employ a volunteer corps of revolutionaries who sought to radically transform Iranian society into a more just, independent, and Muslim country. After the Pahlavi government fell, the calls to strengthen the institution of the family — and specifically facilitate women’s roles within the domestic sphere— reverberated in the halls of state institutions, which were undergoing radical, cultural revolutions of their own.¹⁴² Certain semi-autonomous companies, like Kayhan Institute (publishers of the magazine *Zan-e Rouz*), though not a direct apparatus of the state, such as the national television and oil companies, underwent drastic changes in staff, membership, and institutional objectives. On the national level, revolutionary clerics and their supporters emphasized the establishment of a mass media that was both informative and expressed the ethical values defined by the constitution of the Islamic Republic.¹⁴³ At the same

¹⁴⁰ Ibid., p. 177.

¹⁴¹ Arjomand, *After Khomeini*, pp. 22-23.

¹⁴² I explore the topic of public morality in greater detail in Chapter Four. At this point, I concentrate on contextualizing and analyzing the visual representation of a modest Muslim female character in post-revolutionary *Zan-e Rouz* editions.

¹⁴³ For discussion on Khomeini’s suspicions of the international press, see Sreberny and Mohammadi, *Small Media, Big Revolution*, p. 134. Of Iran’s domestic media, Khomeini wrote, “...I have seen a number of them engaged in implementing the evil designs of the right or the left, most unjustly, in

time, a national constitution was being drafted, insisting that in an Islamic Republic, women would not be treated as “an object or instrument in the service of promoting consumerism and exploitation.” She would, instead, “recover her momentous and precious function of motherhood, rearing of ideologically committed human beings,” and “[assume] a pioneering social role and becomes the fellow struggler of man in all vital areas of life.”¹⁴⁴

While other women’s magazines were closed down (due to diverse reasons, such as government pressure or lack of staff and funding), *Zan-e Rouz* survived after having overhauled its editorial board and overall objectives. The weekly reformed itself in the 1980s as an Islamic lifestyle magazine, entering the revolutionary enterprise. Editor Shahla Ansari took the helm of the journal in 1980, followed by Firuzeh Gol-Mohammadi and then feminist Shahla Sherkat until 1991.¹⁴⁵ The new editorial board initiated a drastically different agenda from its pre-revolutionary past. Iranian human rights lawyer Mehrangiz Kar recalls, “The weekly *Zan-e Rooz* (Today’s Woman), had, like a modern woman who had suddenly become pious and weighted down with the *hejab*, transformed.”¹⁴⁶ She observes, “It continued to be published, only now its

Iran...I hope that they will engage in service to God and the people.” Ruhollah Khomeini, “We Shall Confront the World with Our Ideology,” *MERIP Reports*, no. 88, *Iran’s Revolution: The First Year* (June 1980): p. 25.

¹⁴⁴“Women in the Constitution,” Preamble, *Islamic Republic of Iran Constitution*, adopted October 24, 1979, amended July 28, 1989.

¹⁴⁵ Shahla Sherkat wrote about her experiences as a journalist and chief-editor for *Zan-e Rouz*. She says the semi-public organization behind *Zan-e Rouz* terminated her contract for “promoting modernist, Westernized and feminist tendencies.” She later became founder and editor-in-chief of influential feminist journal *Zanan*. See Shahla Sherkat, “Telling the Stories of Iranian Women’s Lives,” *Nieman Reports*, Summer 2009, accessed May 4, 2012, <http://www.nieman.harvard.edu/reports/article/101473/Telling-the-Stories-of-Iranian-Womens-Lives.aspx>.

¹⁴⁶ Mehrangiz Kar, *Crossing the Red Line: The Struggle for Human Rights in Iran* (Costa Mesa: Blind Owl Press, 2007), p. 99. Kar writes that many women’s publications after the revolution were published under

cover seemed tired and dark.”¹⁴⁷ No longer would magazine articles report on Googoosh and beauty pageant contestants. Photographs published in *Zan-e Rouz* incorporated an Islamic coding into its visual topography of women’s bodies. Veiled women were photographed at work, in village settings, engaging in handicraft, wearing traditional clothing, or in their homes. They were depicted in stereotypically traditional settings deemed more suitable and representative of the lifestyle that a Muslim, Iranian woman in the modern Islamic Republic would have.

In post-revolutionary editions of the *Zan-e Rouz*, content features the methods in which to foster Islamic social virtues, including sections on respecting women and their roles as Muslims, wives, and mothers and maintaining chaste and modest relations between the sexes. Moreover, the magazine’s advertisements have changed considerably in content, design, and look; they no longer include photographs highlighting lingerie, American appliances, and fashion trends. Instead, a typical print ad would feature wedding attire, sewing classes, daycare, real estate, and potential marriage suitors. Arts and crafts sections, such as *khayati* (sewing), were too expanded. Content-wise, articles are focused on novel methods to enhance women’s spiritual health, reporting on topics such as “*rouh-e zan*” (woman’s soul) and establishing a new column entitled “women in the family,” to highlight their unique role within this social unit. The number of photo spreads and news reports on Islamic attire and clothing typically worn by Iran’s indigenous, tribal communities were also increased.

the supervision of Qom and Mashad-based seminaries, encouraging the “myth of Fatemeh, which had been transformed in the patriarchal minds of men who directed these publications into an order of obedience, contentment and silence for women.” Ibid.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid.

The new direction for *Zan-e Rouz*—as a magazine catering to a distinctly Muslim female audience— was meant to reinforce the notion that the newly-coined Islamic Republic was promoting a nativist, spiritually-inclined and family-oriented version of Iranian woman. Moreover, the magazine also showcased certain theological debates, discussing *Qur’anic* exegesis, and publishing feature articles on particular *ulama* interpretations of *hejab* and women’s rights in Islam.¹⁴⁸ Regarding the latter, the incorporation of rights discourse from the *Qur’an* in post-1979 editions of *Zan-e Rouz* offered a popular and literary platform on which to promote the Revolution’s ideological tenets, which were enumerated in both its national constitution and in the mission statement of its Cultural Revolutionary Council. This committee, established by the Islamic Republic’s ideological founder Ayatollah Khomeini, began setting expectations for state media, stipulating that it should reflect and support good morals based on faith and also raise public awareness through the proper use of mass media. For these reasons, the majority of post-revolutionary *Zan-e Rouz*’s content highlights Muslim women’s piety and family roles.

Ideological Subjects in the Islamic Republic of Iran: From Bodies to Body Parts

Ashraf Zahedi has argued, “To revive authentic Islamic beliefs as the foundation of a new society, it was necessary to re-educate Muslims, particularly women.”¹⁴⁹ The

¹⁴⁸ *Zan-e Rouz* published a commentary series on women’s rights in Islam, penned by Grand Ayatollah Motahhari (a Khomeini colleague who authored many treatises, on subjects of *hejab* and women’s rights in Islam). In one of the articles, he discusses the concepts of *hejab* and modesty. The article offers advice to women about preserving their modesty in order to best realize a good character. See *Zan-e Rouz*, Issue 1165 (Ordibehesht 1367/ May 1988), pp. 11-12.

¹⁴⁹ Zahedi, “Contested Meaning of the Veil and Political Ideologies of Iranian Regimes,” *Journal of Middle East Women’s Studies* 3, no. 3 (Fall 2007): p. 86.

following illustration, printed within one year after the Revolution, best exemplifies Zahedi's point regarding the types of instructional methods and material created to instruct and guide women, specifically. Figure 8 is an illustration that accompanied a February 1980 article in *Zan-e Rouz* entitled "Woman, in Three Mirrors" from the section, "Knowing the Right Islam in the Domain of Women."¹⁵⁰ The drawing is meant to depict how women operate in different socioeconomic and ideological systems—in this case, those of capitalism, communism, and Islam. Moreover, it conveys positive values for women representing the Muslim faith—and to some extent, how women within this structure should achieve and embrace these values.



Figure 8

As understood by reading the article accompanying this drawing, the three female figures are not meant to depict women as they appear in human form; in fact, they portray

¹⁵⁰ *Zan-e Rouz*, Issue 750 (1358/1980), pp. 10-11, 56.

symbolic and generic prototypes. Each figure is a representative member of a distinct ideological system that is practiced in different geographic areas. The left-most figure is a generic American woman, followed by her Soviet counterpart in the middle, and lastly, a woman from a Muslim country. While it is not certain this last country represents Iran (for its country flag bears different features), it is clear that the inclusion of Arabic and the message it communicates, via the *shahada*, which is the most important Muslim proclamation of faith meaning “There is no God but God,” suggest that this female figure is a member of the *ommat* (the worldwide community of Muslims bound by their faith).¹⁵¹ Assuming that each flag corresponds to a particular ideological system or way of life, then it is surmised that the American woman heralds from a capitalist system, and her Soviet and Muslim counterparts represent the systems of communism and Islamism, respectively.

Viewed in juxtaposition, these figures reveal two underlying assumptions about women’s participation in certain ideological systems: first, that their roles, values, and worth can be both limited to and depicted through the use of their requisite body parts; second, that women are represented as the boundary-making objects of a state’s ideological system and political agenda. In each figure, symbolic body parts are blackened to emphasize the values associated with a particular ideology. For the American, her values are expressed through the exploitation of her physical appearance, which is illustrated in the illustrator’s accentuation of her bodily shape. The article supports this claim, referring to American women as easily “usable,” especially in a capitalist system that encourages them to project their sexuality into the public domain. By comparison, the Soviet prototype and the Iranian/Muslim prototype are more

¹⁵¹ The Persian pronunciation of the Arabic term *ummah* is *ommat*, also transliterated as *ummat*.

favorably depicted. While the Soviet woman uses her arms, representing her labor power, the Muslim figure uses both her intellect and emotions, depicted in the drawing of her brain and heart.

Indeed it is the Muslim female subject who is exemplary among this group. In an Islamic system, she is able to exploit her mental and emotional capacities, which distinguishes herself from her counterparts. Moreover, standing next to the *shahada*, she is supported by a community of faith that endows her with these specific capabilities and values. The inclusion of the *Qur'anic* injunction of the *shahada* means that she, too, has “Truth” on her side, signifying her obedience to God’s absolute words.¹⁵² As such, her strengths lie not in her physical appearance, but in the union of her head, heart, and God to determine her value and worth. This message is thus conveyed to any *Zan-e Rouz* reader, who becomes engaged in a one-way conversation about the benefits of membership in an Islamic society.

Beyond the primary meaning conveyed by both the illustration and article, there are many underlying messages that register a darker reading of this representation of women. Clearly the juxtaposition of female prototypes demonstrates an underlying assumption about women’s worth—that its significance is best expressed by its association with a particular system or ideology, be it of Western origin or not. Likewise, the figure of woman is constrained by the expectations and details of these three prisms,

¹⁵² See Dabashi and Chelkowski, *Staging a Revolution: The Art of Persuasion in the Islamic Republic of Iran*, pp. 101-102. Dabashi discusses the usage of Arabic *naskh* calligraphy in revolutionary posters and banners. He notes that the phrases are typically excerpted from the *Qur'an* and are thus regarded as the true utterances of God. Most Iranians would not have been literate enough in Arabic to understand its meaning, though, according to Dabashi, their presence would be immediately noticed, provoking awe in any Muslim. The inclusion of Arabic would have been regarded with semiotic wonder, as “Whatever is actually written in that Arabic cannot be but the Truth manifest.” He explains, “Such Arabic phrases demand obedience by merely being there.”

or “mirrors,” as the article’s title suggests. Hence, women do not represent themselves; they represent entire systems. As an example, the Muslim woman is depicted as a collective entity and *not* as an individual. Thus women are presented as having an absence of choice, in moving fluidly between each system and more so, to variegate which mental and physical capacities they wish to exploit.

This restrictive articulation of women as possessing a symbolic body presents special challenges for Iranian women in particular— especially in post-revolutionary Iran when the transformation from a westernized, capitalist-leaning woman of the Pahlavi era to an ideal Muslim woman was expected to happen posthaste. In this paradigm, an Iranian-Muslim woman does not navigate different ideological structures. Both her exclusion from and inclusion into a particular ideological community are dependent on how she proves her worth in relation to the ideal character imagined by that Islamist system.

Demonstrating Modesty through Caricature

The process of transforming a woman’s westernized body into a modest configuration involved applying several visual and editorial techniques to construct and style a prototypic image of a Muslim female subject. Islamist-lifestyle magazines were optimal forums to spotlight a new visual reality for the figure of a Muslim woman. As a way to signal *Zan-e Rouz*’s non-exploitative treatment of women, article content integrated many of the motifs popular among Iran’s clerical authority: piety, modesty, family, and morality, among many others. Evoking these values would mean modifying societal behavior by introducing and, in many cases, emphasizing norms of conduct.

For example, early editions of post-revolutionary *Zan-e Rouz* published several articles against makeup usage, discontinuing coverage of beauty products and hairstyle trends. Interviews with regime representatives were included in the magazine's content, which can be interpreted as the government's endorsement. In one particular article, a *Zan-e Rouz* journalist interviewed a female parliamentarian from the Islamic Council. (In the article's photograph, a quarter of her face is shielded by a *chador*.) In the interview, she connects makeup usage to the pitfalls of American imperialism and consumerism and lambastes women in "Third World countries" who wear makeup. She claims their emphasis on their physical appearance has made them vulnerable to exploitation by consumerist nations, and thus encourages Iranian women to lift themselves up.¹⁵³ To reject the trappings of a consumerist society, women are advised to become "unaccustomed" to makeup usage in order to promote their inner spiritual capacities.¹⁵⁴

Another method of communicating Islamic values to Iranian women was achieved through standardizing the way they should appear in public. How this manifests in action was through modifying women's bodies in images using various techniques. A favored method was streamlining contours of the body. Essentially the process of transforming women's bodies into Islamic versions entailed manipulating with pictorial depictions of their figures to prevent any scenario whereby they would be viewed as sexually desirable. A woman's breasts, hips, arms, posterior, and legs were especially scrutinized; according to some religious scholars, they are considered *awrat*, an Islamic term denoting sensitive

¹⁵³ *Zan-e Rouz*, Issue 851 (1361/1982) pp. 46-48.

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

or intimate body parts that must be covered in order to prevent sin.¹⁵⁵ The areas of a woman's body that are perceived to provoke illicit desire if they should be exposed, they are subject to modification as a way to return to a modest form. I discuss the subject of *awrat* in greater detail in Chapter Four and Chapter Five. At this point, I focus on the techniques used in print publications to cover a woman's *awrat*.

Of the *Zan-e Rouz* issues I reviewed, dating from 1980 until 1986, photographs (whose original negatives feature European and American models in western attire) are extensively doctored. Almost every image (and every female featuring) in the magazine has undergone some kind of reconstruction. *Awrat* areas in particular are usually covered by extra clothing, which is often superimposed onto the original image. In many cases, veils and trouser legs are added on bare legs, and skirts and sleeves are elongated. Save the feet and hands, arms and legs are no longer exposed, as they are considered naked and thus inappropriate for public viewing. Additionally, print models are given "Islamic" makeovers. They wear *hejab* and have minimal make-up on their faces. The lack of accent to their facial features can be read as an attempt to convey a woman's disinclination to beautify herself for the admiration of men, other than her husband.¹⁵⁶

In many images, the natural curves of her body shape, such as the hip and posterior areas, appear to be flat or downsized. Certain anatomical features of the body

¹⁵⁵ The concept of *awrat* (in the singular *'awra*) appears in the *Qur'an* to describe the private parts of men and women not to be exposed and the moment during the day when male servants or children could not enter homes without permission. See Chapters Four and Five, for a more detailed description of *awrat*.

¹⁵⁶ There was no pamphlet or guidebook to demarcate the "look" of a modest iconography of women's bodies on the pages of magazines. The techniques for projecting modesty happened as a process of trial and error, which meant that initially, there were no standard representations of the figure of woman in the first years after the revolution. For instance, in 1980 issues of *Zan-e Rouz*, women are pictured without a *hejab* and are photographed with men, to whom they are unrelated. In issues from 1985 to 1986, women are photographed almost always wearing an Islamic *hejab*.

are also removed or obscured, such as nipples and navels.¹⁵⁷ In cases when no photograph exists, simplistic drawings are used to depict female figures or specific body parts. In certain instances, when body parts are excised and thus missing from the original figure, a cartoon is superimposed onto it. In the next three illustrations, I document each of these techniques, starting with the design method used to reduce a woman's bodily curves. Figure 9 demonstrates this very technique.

Reconvening its columns on health and body maintenance after the Revolution, *Zan-e Rouz*'s editors continued publishing step-by-step exercise regimens to promote healthy lifestyles and physiques of its readers. Figure 9, for example, is a 1980 illustration of a husband and wife team posing in various stretch positions.¹⁵⁸ The captions accompanying each exercise pose provide narrative snippets about a married couple seeking to lose weight. As a solution, the author suggests working out together to achieve both marital unity and weight loss.

The drawing in Figure 9 is an atypical illustration found in the "*Varzesh*" (exercise) section from post-revolutionary editions of *Zan-e Rouz*. Subsequent illustrations found here depict an individual man or woman exercising separately, holding different stretch poses; they are no longer portrayed exercising as a couple. In 1985 editions of the "*Varzesh*" section, women's bodies are depicted in outline form and

¹⁵⁷ Other techniques detected in post-revolutionary issues of *Zan-e Rouz* involved anatomizing women's bodies; instead of illustrating the body as it appeared from the outside, the body was broken down into anatomical parts, using detailed representations of women's internal organs. The effect of this representation is that the body is treated as an object of science, and it is prevented and disassociated from being an object of desire. In a section dedicated to "Medical Advice," found adjacent to the section "Family Health," anatomical drawings of a woman's orbital area and of a male figure's thyroid gland are illustrated. See *Zan-e Rouz*, Issue 1041 (16 Farvardin 1365 / April, 1985), pp. 26-27.

¹⁵⁸ *Zan-e Rouz*, Issue 757, *Norooz* edition (5 Esfand 1358/ February 24, 1980), pp. 28-29.

illustrated with less detail in the face and body, as shown in Figures 10 through 12.¹⁵⁹ A year later, in 1986, characters are no longer presented wearing full-bodied leotards as an example of exercise attire. Female characters in particular are depicted wearing appropriate Islamic dress, such as headscarves, *manteau* (long overcoat), and in many cases, trousers, as shown in Figure 12.

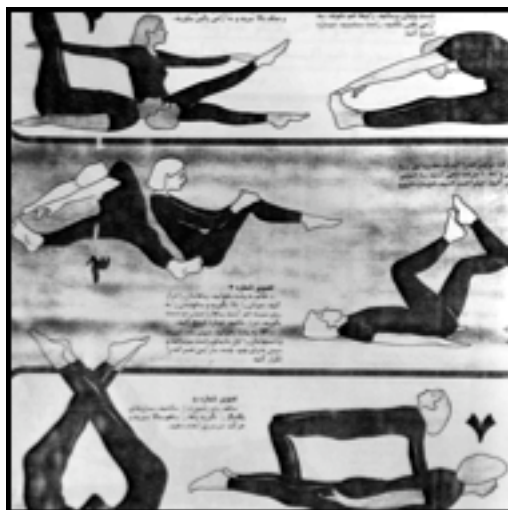


Figure 9

¹⁵⁹ Figure 10 and 11, see *Zan-e Rouz*, Issue 1093 (24 Aban 1365/ November 15, 1986), p. 23. Figure 12, *Zan-e Rouz*, Issue 1112 (22 Farvardin 1366/ April 11, 1987), p. 18.



Figure 10



Figure 11



Figure 12

In Figure 9, specifically, many of the techniques used to modify women's figures into ideal representatives of an Islamist system are evident, especially in the streamlined presentation of a woman's curves. Notice how the woman's breast area is variously represented in different scenes. When the female character is seated, with one leg raised, her chest is evident in the twisting of her body. In one specific pose, both man and woman's bodies join to form an upside-down heart, evidenced by the empty space formed between their legs.¹⁶⁰ As shown in Figure 9, in which the female subject pushes her body up off the floor, her breasts vanish. Her body is streamlined to look like that of her male exercise partner. This depiction results in the de-sexualization of her body—her body shape is rendered formless, appearing linear. As shown in Figure 12, the woman is depicted as a faceless, veil-wearing caricature that performs exercises with an automatic motion.

¹⁶⁰ This heart formation pose reminds us of the heart in Figure 8, drawn inside the figure of the Muslim female prototype to symbolize her spiritual and emotional core.

Moallem contends that the veil became an immediate visual marker for staging difference between men and women and more so, between the westernized woman and her purported opposite: the modest, pious Muslim subject.¹⁶¹ For women entering public and official spaces, compulsory *hejab* became nationwide policy almost two years after the Revolution.¹⁶² *Zan-e Rouz* editors appeared to have anticipated this policy change because by 1980, the *hejab* —or some version of a headscarf— featured in many of its photo spreads and illustrations. Effectively any image or representation of a woman meant for public display was held to the same standard as that of a woman on the street: both would observe Islamic *hejab* to preserve public morality.



Figure 13

As an illuminating example of how the *hejab* is incorporated into the project of staging difference, consider Figure 13. When photographs could not be easily doctored given the rudimentary graphic design technology of the early 1980s, artists drew in

¹⁶¹ Moallem, p. 28.

¹⁶² Ziba Mir-Hosseini, "The Conservative: Reformist Conflict over Women's Rights in Iran," p. 42. In 1983, appearing in public without a *hejab* was considered an offence against public morality, as stipulated in Article 102 of Islamic Punishments. The penalty advised for this activity was seventy-four lashes and fines.

feminine-like features to obscure the appearance of exposed heads of hair and limbs. However the end result often looked like an awkward caricature with non-human features. An example of this technique is found in Figure 13. This is a *Zan-e Rouz* illustration of female characters dressed in contemporary coat fashions for the 1980 fall season.¹⁶³ Departing from colorful photo displays from the Pahlavi era, *Zan-e Rouz* introduces cartoon renditions of models to illustrate the upcoming fall season line of women's jackets. Here, fashion enters the realm of the imaginary: the illustrator has obscured the female figures' faces by superimposing butterfly hats to convey that their heads are appropriately modified—and ultimately covered.¹⁶⁴

As shown in Figure 13, the headline “*Ba Yek Kot*” (With One Jacket) runs across the photo spread. The title denotes a message of fashionable frugality. As the illustration depicts, cartoon models pose in different outfits while wearing the same jacket. The main idea being expressed is that a modern Muslim woman need not buy many clothes; by buying the right jacket, she can wear one item of clothing in a variety of styles. Now this economical message cannot be registered without realizing the irony behind this advertisement: with the rising tides of anti-consumerism, *Zan-e Rouz* editors endeavor to promote a non-extravagant lifestyle—in this case, to accommodate one's wardrobe with what one already has and not with items that one does not necessarily need.

Indeed, switching from the pre-revolutionary marketing of makeup and couture designs from European companies to then promoting goods and behaviors perceived to be reflective of an Islamic lifestyle was not executed without compromise and thus

¹⁶³ *Zan-e Rouz*, Issue 735 (1358/1980), pp. 52-53.

¹⁶⁴ Notice, too, that their legs are exposed, although this is understandable given that, in the first year after the Revolution, wearing trousers and overcoats was not yet standard practice among Iranian women.

reveals a contradiction. By “Islamicizing” illustrations, *Zan-e Rouz* continues promoting the accents of a more pious lifestyle. Yet, the very fact that the magazine advertises products to potential customers means that the consumerism, lambasted as a corrupting force in Iranian society prior to the Revolution, was not eradicated with the founding of the new state. Advertising was a major source of revenue for the magazine, as was the case during the Pahlavi era. The notion that Iran becoming an Islamic Republic would mean the cessation of this need for revenue or that Iranian women would stop buying and dressing in a certain way is not supported by the evidence found in the journal itself. Interestingly, in post-revolutionary issues of *Zan-e Rouz*, the outpouring of print advertisements for beauty and weight regimens—bearing no pictures of women yet still advertising weight loss and plastic surgery programs—are published on pages in which handicraft and religiosity are also presented. The magazine’s fashion exhibitions may have conveyed that they were catering to a Muslim readership; however, they were also targeting an audience of female consumers.



Figure 14

By 1986, butterfly-esque *hejab* no longer featured in *Zan-e Rouz* fashion spreads; by the early 1980s, female models wearing veils was the visual marker for women featured in advertisements, regardless of their origin or religious dispositions. In effect, all visual representations of women printed in images and advertisements for public consumption did not differentiate between which women should and should not wear the veil. It is an automatic insertion, and, as shown in Figure 14, the *hejab* acts as a cover-up stamp, marking the female subject's transformation into a default post-revolutionary Muslim subject. Figure 14 is a photograph of an advertisement for male and female robes from *Zan-e Rouz*'s sewing section. The photograph is obviously doctored—where a female model's head should be, a cartoon head with a veil is drawn in.¹⁶⁵

When comparing both male and female models, the starkness in their presentations suggests an extra sensitivity towards the depiction of the woman's body. While the male model appears at ease, as if dressed in a luxurious bathrobe, the female model is both rigid and out-of-scale. The man's figure remains untouched, and upon closer inspection, there are even chest hairs visible in the opening of his robe. Wearing a bulky jacket, the female model is not in the original form she was photographed. Her "real" head is completely cut off. The positive space—in art, the space that is occupied by an element or a form that is the intended focus of that image—is filled-in with a depiction of a *hejab*-wearing caricature. In effect, the female figure is depicted as part-cartoon, part-human next to her fully human, male counterpart.

¹⁶⁵ *Zan-e Rouz*, Issue 1098 (29 Azar 1365/ December 20, 1986), p. 4.

Reforming Contentious Women's Bodies

For the *Zan-e Rouz* images highlighted in this post-revolutionary period, the body of any woman is a site of contestation in need of editorial and visual transformation. This is demonstrated not only in the technique of presenting women's bodies as abstract prototypes, but also in the in the didactic articles and advertisements teaching Iranian women how to become modest Muslim women via changing their appearance and behavior.

There have been numerous studies on compulsory *hejab* and its historical contestation, acceptance, and usage among women in different social classes, ethnic groups, education levels, and religious backgrounds.¹⁶⁶ At this moment, I do not seek to add to this extensive scholarship, especially to the valuable reflections on the concept of *hejab* as it has been articulated in the Iranian political context. What I draw attention to is its inclusion as a design technique in the collection of disciplining tools of women's bodies. Earlier, I mentioned the method of minimizing natural curves of women in photographs to diminish the hint of their sexual appeal to the desirous male gaze. When the contours of breasts and buttocks are pared and trimmed, there is little way of distinguishing between the bodies of men and women in different scenes. The effect of streamlining women's bodies is the construction of ostensibly genderless bodies, which purportedly are no longer viewed as sexually explicit or sexually arousing. What are other conceptual pitfalls and repercussions to this re-sculpting of women's body shapes to reflect an ideological point-of-view? By depicting women's figures as contourless abstractions, bodies become stand-in representatives for women who do not communicate

¹⁶⁶ See Najmabadi (1993), Moallem (2005), Varzi (2006), and Valetine Moghadam (1993, 2003, 2004); Fatemeh Sadeghi (2008).

difference. Instead, it reveals compliance to particular norms outlined by that ideological disposition, applied in a one-directional, ahistorical manner. In other words, when transforming “to” an Islamic subject, one is expected to abandon her origins and identity prior to that metamorphosis.

As these images demonstrate, representations of women’s bodies in post-revolutionary editions of *Zan-e Rouz* are doctored and re-constructed to reflect an ideal, Islamic female subject. Often through subtle didactic methods, modesty is drawn onto female figures, in cartoons, advertisements, and photographs. With the addition of a *hejab* and articles on family values to accompany these images, new norms of sociability are being reinforced to *Zan-e Rouz*’s audience. However these tactics should be perceived, too, as examples of disciplinary technologies, outlining the Islamist regime’s parameters for modest conduct and appearance specifically for the female subject. Underlining this strategy is the anticipated fear of arousal in the face of female sexuality; ostensibly, there are many unforeseen consequences if photographs and illustrations of women’s bodies are left unaltered, their heads unveiled, or their limbs exposed. The viewer will assumedly be confronted with an array of indecent thoughts.

Piecing Together Pre-and-Post 1979 Hegemonic Narratives of Women’s Bodies

The era of the late 1960s until the final steps into the 1979 Revolution mark a momentous period in the evolving, visual landscape of Iranian women’s bodies. The state-administered techniques of modernizing women in the 1960s and 1970s were very similar to the reform techniques applied in the re-designing of the female subject during the inaugural years of the Islamist regime. What appears to be a stark contrast in the

representation and treatment of women and their bodies from the pre-revolutionary to post-revolutionary periods was, as I have documented, only skin-deep.

The post-1979 modification of the figure of woman as a modest rendition did not, in essence, signal a structural change or reversal in the conceptual treatment of women. Indeed, more Iranian women were visually (and compulsorily) veiled after the Revolution. In the domain of women's magazines, the novel iconography of Iranian women in the Islamic Republic speaks only to the *appearance* of new norms of sociability defined by an Islamist ideological framework. However, the representation of Iranian women's bodies as veiled, all the while fulfilling ideal prototypes subject to fundamentalist control of women's gender roles in Islam, was merely a reactive adaptation of a Pahlavi-era leitmotif. The techniques used to construct a post-revolutionary Islamic female subject were in fact crafted during the modernization reform period of the Pahlavi era. The conceptual foundation underlying women's liberation and improved social status was that women were both malleable and receptive to reform by popular culture and Iran's revolutionary Islamist ideology. The notion itself was indeed revolutionary, for it initiated Iranian women's entrance into a modern, westernized lifestyle—one that they had not previously known existed and thus were shown by various state apparatuses, including Empress Pahlavi herself.

When looking at the sample of post-revolutionary images from *Zan-e Rouz*, one can easily argue that a verifiable "Islamic coding" of the figure of woman is evident in the post-1979 stylization of women's bodies as veiled and streamlined. In other visual media, this term has been used to define the representation of the figure of woman in post-revolutionary Iranian cinema. In the 1998 article "Body-less Faces: Mutilating

Modernity and Abstracting Women in an ‘Islamic Cinema,’” Dabashi notes, “Veiled women who had participated in the evolution from its earliest stages... Soon after the revolution... posters began to propagate an ‘Islamic’ code on the emerging vision of a revolutionary woman.”¹⁶⁷ In post-revolutionary Iranian “Islamic cinema,” he argues that the figure of woman is the “site of relentless contestation between a metaphysics of concealment and an aesthetics of revelation.”¹⁶⁸ According to Dabashi, in this aesthetic paradigm, “danger” and “Truth” are integrated into constructions of the figure of woman as taboo.¹⁶⁹ This culminates in anxieties and fears about the exposure of women’s bodies, which in turn leads to the mutilation or erasure of representations of women from public space and, in its most visual example, it leads to the *hejab* visually overtaking women’s bodies by fully covering them. To ensure that a woman’s body is not the source of social disorder—in that it evokes illicit desires in the viewer—women’s bodies are “absented,” covered by “layers and then more layers of dark and prohibitive scarves.” Dabashi observes:

Behold the forcefully absented presence of the Iranian woman on the wide but ever narrower screen of an "Islamic" cinema, the post-Islamic-revolution impossibility of being feminine, the censorial brutality of mutated bodies, carefully cut off and concealed from faces that must now speak and envision, act and convey, the entire task of a denied body.¹⁷⁰

Though film is not visual media that I analyze in this discussion, Dabashi’s usage of “Islamic coding” is a useful segue into the conclusion of this chapter. As I mentioned

¹⁶⁷ Dabashi and Chelkowski, *Staging a Revolution*, p. 88.

¹⁶⁸ Hamid Dabashi, “Body-less Faces: Mutilating Modernity and Abstracting Women in an ‘Islamic Cinema,’” *Visual Anthropology* 10, no. 2-4 (1998): p. 361.

¹⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 362-363.

¹⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 362.

earlier in the introduction of this chapter, year 1979 is regarded as a watershed moment in Iranian history, when a revolution fundamentally changed the political, social, cultural, and economic institutions. Because I pushed back the timeline, so to speak, into the 1960s, I was able to cast a wider frame of reference for the purposes of reading, both visually and contextually, the many representations of women from before and after the Iranian Revolution.

What should by now be transparent is that the dual state and media enterprise of producing norms and values entails the heavy investment of women. This is true for issues of *Zan-e Rouz* published under the direction of the Pahlavis and under the editorial leadership of Khomeini's supporters. Although this magazine does not account for the whole range of publications that constitute Iran's print media industrial complex, it nevertheless provides a linear terrain on which to pinpoint the shifts and similarities in each regime's method of reform on a popular level. From how a woman is positioned on a chaise to the way she holds a cigarette; from her modest style of dress to how she stretches her limbs, these are all examples of the methods of socialization and regulation pursued by successive regimes. What they similarly demonstrate is that the projection of an idealized, normalized Iranian female character is in need of instruction on how to dress; how to socialize; how to be informed; and how to properly "become" a true modern woman—regardless if she is an Iranian citizen before or after 1979.

Central to many of these reform and advertising campaigns—be they campaigns to sell a product to a modern consumer or to endorse a pious way of life to a female believer—is that in order for women to understand how to reform, one must guide and frame the parameters for how they should improve. As a visual and material platform

upon which to promote a new Iranian female citizen, *Zan-e Rouz* was perhaps an ideal medium. In presenting to a female audience a stylized construct of the modern Iranian woman, *Zan-e Rouz* operated as a visual guide for mapping out a modern woman's interests, fashion sensibilities, and political inclinations. Under the Pahlavis, the self-promotion and "modernization" of Iranian women were manifest in the updating of their physical appearances and through the imposed transformation of their hobbies, interests, and desires. The inclusion of Empress Farah Pahlavi in its inaugural edition was the photographic moment of naissance for the modernization of women during the White Revolution. Indeed, the enterprise of constructing a modern, Iranian woman had found a perfectly fashionable, female citizen to convey to the Iranian public new norms of sociability.

Though the physical appearance and ideal characteristics of this female citizen change come 1979, the rationale behind their need for reform, in fact, remains the same. That women subsequently were subject to an "Islamic coding"—for instance, their heads covered by *hejab* or their arms sleeved—is an important, albeit relatively minor detail given Iran's extensive history of introducing and implementing reform measures designed to educate, re-educate, and/or underestimate women in order to compliment a particular political or ideological persuasion. A continuous motif among the Khomeini-inspired reforms was the notion that Iranian women would require and subsequently embrace their transformation during the formative years of the Islamic Republic into idealized, religiously pious and maternal characters. Despite the outcome of these measures, the reasons behind these methods of reform and regulation seemed eerily similar to those of the Pahlavis. In an effort to prevent women's exposure and

objectification, *Zan-e Rouz* editors after 1979 operated on the same assumption from the Pahlavi-era: that women could learn from prototypes how to embrace certain values; how to understand their roles in a particular religious system; and how to restructure their desires in order to match an overtly patriarchal authority and national project of cultural revolution.

Hence this chapter's discussion of specific *Zan-e Rouz* images, published during these two regimes, is a critical analysis of the problematic construction and illustration of Iranian women during two similar projects of reform. From this sample of images, women are depicted through cartoons and photographs of abstraction; they are abstract because their representation is never truly real. It is often staged, mutilated, and illustrated as a nonhuman prototype —stylized in a way to attract and/or deflect the gaze of the reader, the bystander, or the consumer.

The next chapter is the first half of a two-chapter exploration of the discourse of prostitution in contemporary Iran, analyzing the construction and application of regulatory methods to satiate male sexual desires and control illicit sexual relations, dating from the second Pahlavi period to present-day Islamic Republic. Chapter Two also examines the special personages and spatial transformations of a red-light district in southern Tehran, a site once known as the “citadel” of *Shahr-e No*.

CHAPTER TWO

Red-lights in Parks: A Social History of Park-e Razi

"The present epoch will perhaps be above all the epoch of space. We are in the epoch of simultaneity: we are in the epoch of juxtaposition, the epoch of the near and far, of the side-by-side, of the dispersed. We are at a moment, I believe, when our experience of the world is less that of a long life developing through time than that of a network that connects points and intersects with its own skein."—Foucault, "Of Other Spaces"

Introduction

In the middle of the night, Iranian security forces raided a downtrodden area of East Tehran's District Four.¹⁷¹ This was March 2000, three years into Muhammad Khatami's first presidential tenure. For almost twenty years, authorities had tried in vain to quell the area's black market activities; a place notorious for rampant drug use and the illicit sex trade, it had evolved into a makeshift red-light district. In an effort to *paksazi kardan* (cleanse the district), police forces rounded up residents living in sub-par conditions, many of whom slept in cardboard boxes and lived among trash. District Four¹⁷²—known colloquially as *Khak-e Sefid* (White Dust)—had a notorious reputation.¹⁷³ Locals were described as behaving in a particularly intimidating street manner, often in line with the area's notoriety as a den for criminal activity, prostitution, and drug use. This only aggravated the authorities' suspicions of the area, for this behavior was said to rub off on new residents. With little warning, the area disappeared into the night. Homes were destroyed. Though some residents were financially

¹⁷¹ Akbar Varvayi, "Barrasi-ye Avamel-e Rouspigari-ye Kheyabani dar Tehran-e Bozorg/The Investigation of the Causes of Street Prostitution in Greater Tehran." PhD diss., University of Tehran, School of Law and Political Science, 2008, p. 51.

¹⁷² District Four is the northeastern suburb of Tehranpars in Tehran, Iran.

¹⁷³ Varvayi, "Barrasi-ye Avamel-e Rouspigari-ye Kheyabani dar Tehran-e Bozorg/The Investigation of the Causes of Street Prostitution in Greater Tehran."

compensated, those remaining lived in provisional shelters; others suspected of black market activity were transferred to detention centers.

Midnight raids were not out of the ordinary in the seedy districts of the capital, where drug usage and knife crimes were often reported. More than ten years earlier, in 1989, authorities had raided the *Mahal-e Jamshid* (Jamshid District), in the southwest area of central Tehran; reportedly around 4,000 persons were arrested. Though the identities and occupations of the apprehended cannot be confirmed, the few available reports suggest the existence of an unmanageable sex trade in urban areas of Iran. Of those detained in the Jamshid district, 800 were apprehended for suspicion of being prostitutes.¹⁷⁴ In 2003 alone, forty-one brothels in Tehran were also raided, of which seventy-two men and eighteen women were apprehended for participation in the sex trade. The same year, 1,080 brothels were shut down countrywide, and almost 6,700 people were arrested for prostitution-related charges.¹⁷⁵ Although not openly discussed by authorities, eradicating former sites of societal corruption was instrumental to the policy of defining and maintaining public morality.¹⁷⁶ Women referred to colloquially as coming from *najeeb-khaneh*¹⁷⁷ (prostitute's home) were particularly targeted, rounded

¹⁷⁴ Ibid., p. 45.

¹⁷⁵ Ibid.

¹⁷⁶ The “concept of ‘corruption,’ has shifted since the 1979 revolution to include adultery, prostitution, homosexuality, drug trafficking, alcohol consumption, and common crimes such as murder and theft,” explains Parvin Paidar. This concept of moral corruption will be discussed further in this chapter. See Paidar, p. 345.

¹⁷⁷ In Persian, *najeeb khaneh* is an ironic term, often expressed sarcastically, to mean a prostitute's home. Its literal meaning refers to a place in which women are chaste and morally sound, as the term *najeeb* literally means chaste. The literal meaning appeals to the image of a woman who seeks her sexual desire within a family setting and framework; she is committed to her husband and typically her actions do not arouse gossip or suspicion. When a woman is referred to as *najeeb* in the context of *najeeb-khaneh*, then she is being humiliated for her supposedly unchaste behavior. It is a pejorative comment meant to discredit

up en masse so that suspected prostitutes could be separated from everyone else — apparently, the morally inclined. Yet despite these efforts to demolish enclaves of prostitution, the sex industry is itself nowhere near its end.

Before *Khak-e Sefid* and other makeshift vice areas were forming in eastern Tehran and long before the 1979 Revolution, red-light districts were already well-known fixtures. Official maps, government reports, and social worker and historian accounts document that a nascent brothel district had formed in the late Qajar period (1785-1925). In March 1786, Tehran—at the time, a group of villages that were selected by the founder of the Qajar dynasty Agha Muhammad Khan for his capital— was en route to becoming a metropolis.¹⁷⁸ The lure of industrial jobs brought rural migrants pouring into the city, forcing the expansion of the city limits.¹⁷⁹ In a location known as a pastoral residence for royal officials, women of varying ages and mostly from rural, economically depressed backgrounds were brought to the area to live and work as prostitutes in ‘*azab-khaneh*’ (private brothels).¹⁸⁰ By the 1920s, these brothels formed a sizable group of houses, known as *Shahr-e No* (New City), which was the largest red-light district in Tehran.¹⁸¹

and/or question the woman’s commitment to her family and husband, meaning that she cannot maintain a chaste role if she sells her body. By referring to her home as *najeeb-khaneh*, the utterance debases not only the woman’s character, but also the home environment in which she lives—ultimately humiliating the female and the family.

¹⁷⁸ “The Traditional Iranian City in the Qajar Period,” Cambridge History of Iran, p. 543. For more information on the historical development of Tehran, see Ferydoon Firoozi, “Tehran: A Demographic and Economic Analysis,” Middle Eastern Studies 10: 1 (January, 1974): pp. 60-76.

¹⁷⁹ According to Asef Bayat, Tehran in 1905 was a walled city of nineteen square kilometers with 160,000 inhabitants; it grew to over 300,000 in the early 1930s. The wall was destroyed in 1930, and soon modern streets were constructed. See Asef Bayat, *Street Politics: Poor People’s Movements in Iran* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997), p. 25.

¹⁸⁰ Willem Floor, *A Social History of Sexual Relations in Iran* (Washington D.C.: Mage Publishers, 2008), p. 257.

¹⁸¹ Ibid., p. 249.

For almost a century, the area housed Iranian female sex workers in a barricaded district.¹⁸² During the Pahlavi regime, the government came to regulate the sex district. University researchers, doctors, social workers, and ministry health officials were sent to *Shahr-e No* to register and check for venereal infections among its inhabitants. However, government regulations did little to ameliorate these women's lives; in fact, it institutionalized an industry built upon the notion that male sexual desires need a relieving space.

Before the fall of the monarchy, much of the opposition's criticism against the Pahlavi government was based on claims that the regime had supported "dens of moral corruption"—meaning cinema houses, private brothels, red-light districts, and entertainment clubs in cities across Iran.¹⁸³ The area in southwest central Tehran—which constituted *Shahr-e No* quarter—was reportedly set afire for that very reason.¹⁸⁴ Only

¹⁸² The establishment of *Shahr-e No* was not unprecedented. According to Floor, Tehran had a special city quarter for prostitutes during Fath 'Ali Shah's reign (1798-1834), which was closed by Muhammad Shah (1834-48). See Willem Floor, "Venereal Disease in Iran (1855-2005): A Public Affair," *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East* 26, no. 2 (2006): p. 263.

¹⁸³ The destruction of cinemas is also part of the discourse on the destruction of sex districts in Iran. Mob attacks on cinema houses had previously been reported after they were accused of showing foreign "sex" films. In August 1978, controversy swirled around the deathly blaze of Cinema Rex, a cinema house in a poor district of Abadan, Iran. While watching the film "The Deer," starring Behrouz Vossoughi, cinemagoers found themselves trapped inside the movie house. There were more than 430 reported casualties. Soon accusations flew over the perpetrators' identities and political motivations. The Pahlavi regime pointed to anti-regime Islamists and the anti-Shah opposition blamed SAVAK for "arranging a 'Reichstag fire,'" by "locking the cinema doors, and sabotaging the local fire department," done to discredit Islamic militants. See Ervand Abrahamian, *Iran between Two Revolutions* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1982), p. 513. In August 1980, twenty-six people were tried, leading to six executions. The revolutionary courts condemned Captain Monir Taheri as being the main arsonist, however Amnesty International deemed the trial unfair and without due process. See "One Person's Story: Mr. Monir Taheri," Abdorrahman Boroumand Foundation, 2012, accessed August 15, 2011, <http://www.iranrights.org/english/memorial-case--3246.php>. For an investigative report on the fire, see Amnesty International, "Law and Human Rights in the Islamic Republic of Iran," February 1980, accessed January 3, 2012, <http://www.iranomid.com/en/ARCHVS/TheIRIRReport.pdf>.

¹⁸⁴ Saieed Bashirtash and Ebrahim Nabavi, "Shahr-e No Atash Gereft va Rouspiyan Koshteh Shodand/*Shahr-e No* on Fire and Prostitutes Killed," Radio Zamaneh, 9 Bahman 1387/ January 29, 2009, accessed October 5, 2011, http://www.zamaaneh.com/revolution/2009/01.post_218.html.

after Khomeini's supporters consolidated and increased their own power did special revolutionary courts emerge, ordering all brothels closed, demolished, or both. In 1979, prostitution became illegal, and future perpetrators were tried in these courts, with their punishments determined by an Islamic criminal code.¹⁸⁵ Yet the criminalization of prostitution did little to halt the industry's growth in the post-revolutionary period. For the services provided in the red-light district and other brothel areas went both underground and into plain sight. In many of Tehran's parks, deals for prostitute sex were arranged in public, often in front of and, at times, with the complicity of police and government forces. In the former site of *Shahr-e No*, which is now a public park, prostitutes and potential customers easily interact, alongside families picnicking on lawns.

The re-manifestation of prostitution in this park is the culmination of many factors. Notwithstanding the economic reasons, there is a more nuanced aspect for why prostitution has spread in Iran since being banned in 1979. According to popular and high-ranking Shi'a clerical discourses on the subject, prostitution is generally understood as a key practice in maintaining social order. At the same time, in Shi'a ideology, there is an understanding and expectation that female sexuality is reactive and yielding to male sexuality.¹⁸⁶ In the presence of a woman, a man cannot help but desire her, and thus it is the "woman's nature to want to be taken."¹⁸⁷ The responsibility hence falls upon the

¹⁸⁵ Article 138 of the Iranian Islamic Republic of Iran constitution administers the punishment for a convicted man is 75 lashes and exile where the offense took place for at three months to a year. A convicted woman is typically sentenced with 70 lashes. See Iranian Penal Code, Book 2, *Hadd* Punishment, Part 4, Article 135.

¹⁸⁶ Haeri, p. 203.

¹⁸⁷ Ibid.

woman to satiate his desires, reining in his “animal”¹⁸⁸ sexual urges. Sex with prostitutes is therefore justified in the face of rampant male promiscuity. Historically, this has been the case. Under Muhammad Reza Pahlavi, prostitution was regulated through Ministry of Health-mandated health checkups of prostitutes and the supervision of *Shahr-e No*. Under the spiritual and political leadership of the late Ayatollah Khomeini and presently Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, the regulation of prostitution has been vehemently rejected, yet legal exceptions are allowed to accommodate sexual relations conducted outside of a permanent marriage. As I will discuss later, social and economic circumstances are identified as the reasons for pursuing new modes of regulation.

What is unique about the historical narrative of this space, in particular, and discourse of prostitution, in general, is not that sex sells in the Islamic Republic of Iran. Rather, it is that the sex industry continuously mutates itself moments after its brothels are destroyed and prostitutes are arrested. The reasons for this regeneration are institutionally and conceptually-based and perhaps best exemplified by the following idiosyncratic statement made famous in the revolutionary period. At the time of the Gomrok fire, a popular Shi’a cleric and contemporary of Ayatollah Khomeini came to *Shahr-e No*’s defense. Ayatollah Mahmoud Taleghani is widely known to have uttered the oft-repeated line: “Every house needs a *mosterah* (toilet).”¹⁸⁹ Its meaning is

¹⁸⁸ Ibid.

¹⁸⁹ Foundational revolutionary figure, Imam *Jom’eh* (leader of Friday public prayer appointed by Khomeini), and senior Shi’a cleric Ayatollah Sayyid Mahmoud Taleghani made this powerful, idiosyncratic comment in the first days of the revolution, after the red-light district in Gomrok district, Tehran was set ablaze. This comment was often repeated in interviews I conducted in Tehran during the summer months in 2010 and 2011. However, not all interviewees were aware of the phrase’s original source. For more information about Taleghani, see “Sayyid Mahmud Taleqani: The Father of the Revolution” in Dabashi, *Theology of Discontent: The Ideological Foundation of the Islamic Revolution in Iran* (New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 2006).

commonly interpreted as such: that in every society (or house, as Taleghani states), a space of excess must exist as an output for human aggression, sexual release, folly, or, sin.¹⁹⁰ In other words, prostitutes conceptually embody the toilet, acting as a repository for the discharge of male sexuality. In the case of *Shahr-e No*, Taleghani was speaking metaphorically about Iranian society's need to have brothels and prostitutes in order to maintain some level of social order. For many Iranians, Taleghani's phrase speaks to the societal necessity for prostitution —albeit an activity conducted in private. Not only is his comment a spatial reference to the embodiment of prostitution in the figure of a woman, but it also recognizes the almost century-old existence of a government-regulated red-light district in Tehran.

After 1979, with the main site of prostitution eliminated and prostitution criminalized, it is commonly reported that the sex industry goes underground, operating under different conditions. Yet does the physical eradication of a well-known district represent the triumph of one moral authority and political elite over another? In this chapter, I discuss how a societal landmark is demolished and transformed, both physically and conceptually, in contemporary Tehran. I show that even despite this site's makeover from a red-light district into a family park, prostitution actively continues in this site. The reason for its visible presence perhaps lies in the continuity of a particular

¹⁹⁰ The phrase is often found on Persian-language blogs and heard in street conversations. Taleghani's comment was made in early 1979 when asked about the fires destroying red-light districts in southern Tehran. In many ways, Iran was a country set ablaze during its transition from the active protest period of 1977 until spring 1979; salvaging brothel districts from the rubble was the least of the Iranians' problems. Public protests were daily occurrences, whereby demonstrators attacked banks and government offices. In December 1978, the Shah had just fled Iran, leaving an American-backed Prime Minister Bakhtiar in his stead. His legitimacy tarnished in the eyes of the public, Bakhtiar ceded control to an Islamic revolutionary council that independently formed a provisional government, led by new Prime Minister Mehdi Bazargan. Soon a power struggle between the provisional government and the formerly exiled Ayatollah Khomeini went into full throttle over issues concerning Shi'a clerical authority, women's rights, opposition parties, to name just a few.

conceptualization of human sexuality: there is a recognition of the need for a site in which male desire is afforded an outlet for sexual expression. In what follows, I lay the pre-revolutionary historical foundation of this site, focusing on what used to be Iran's most controversial red-light district, *Shahr-e No*, in the pre-revolutionary period. I begin in the late nineteenth century, detailing Pahlavi-era government regulations of brothels until their banning and demolition in 1979. I examine the players and powers operating in this area. I discuss the history of regulation to prevent the spread of venereal disease. I highlight the story of a savvy brothel madam, and I include interviews with former male patrons of the district. Thereafter, I follow the narrative of this particular space's transformations since 1979, focusing on its modern-day configuration, *Park-e Razi* (Razi Park). In this section, I also include field research conducted in the park, from visitors who were knowledgeable of the park's pre-revolutionary history and discussed the current status of prostitution in parks.

By describing the historical development and demise of this red-light district, I weave together many of the political, social, and economic factors that brought about the institutionalization of prostitution first as a government-regulated industry and second—which is the subject of the next chapter—as a religiously sanctioned safety valve for the preservation of male sexuality and social order. These two incarnations of the site of prostitution—as a red-light district and as a public park—are examples of disciplinary methods employed to contain a seemingly out-of-control sex industry. However, as this chapter illustrates, there are many inter-related forces of hygiene, bio-power, space, poverty, and sex that sustain, while also transforming, prostitution into various sites—both physical and conceptual—from the Pahlavi era into present day.

In what follows, I deliberate over these main questions: When a well known vice district space is purposefully developed into a recreational, family-oriented park, does its transformation represent the triumph of one moral authority and political elite over another? Likewise, when brothel areas are publically forgotten and also systematically denied by authorities, do the conditions under which prostitution was conducted and grew disappear given the site's erasure? Furthermore, per Ayatollah Taleghani's 1979 usage of the metaphor of a "toilet," does the analogy reflect what is, in fact, the main reasoning behind the regulation of prostitution and sexuality in the Islamic Republic of Iran?

Regulation of Prostitution during Reza Shah Pahlavi Reign (1925-1941)

In the first half of the twentieth century, the infamous *Shahr-e No* district was publically regarded as a zone where prostitution, drug abuse, *khalafkari* (deceit and mischief),¹⁹¹ and sexually transmitted diseases were rampant. According to one social worker's account, most of the women prostitutes were addicted to opium and *arak*.¹⁹² Controlling the spread of venereal diseases (VD)¹⁹³ in particular was one of the main reasons for the regulation of *Shahr-e No*'s prostitutes. During Reza Shah's reign, syphilis outbreaks were commonly reported here¹⁹⁴ as it had become more widespread by the turn

¹⁹¹ The term *khalafkari* denotes delinquency and wrongdoing in one.

¹⁹² Sattareh Farman Farmaian, *Daughter of Persia* (London: Bantam Press, 1992), p. 301. *Arak* is a highly alcoholic spirit, often homemade.

¹⁹³ In Persian, there are a variety of terms used to describe sexually transmitted diseases (STDs), or *amraz-e mogharebati*. Floor's translation of venereal disease is *bimariha-yi jeldi*. A more common term is *amraz-e mogharebati*. Typically *bimariha-yi jeldi* refers to diseases that affect the skin. As for specific kinds of venereal diseases, syphilis is translated as *seflis*, and gonorrhea is known as *suzak*.

¹⁹⁴ "Shahr-e No: Mazhar-e Fesad dar Qabl az Enqelab/*Shahr-e No*: The Symbol of Moral Corruption before the Revolution," *Tahrikh-e Moaaser-e Iran*, 22 Ordibehesht 1387/ May 11, 2008, accessed November 21, 2011, <http://bahman18.blogfa.com/post-11.aspx>.

of the nineteenth century and was steadily increasing.¹⁹⁵ The spread of certain diseases, like syphilis, was the fault of prostitutes, who were blamed for the rising infection rates.¹⁹⁶ In the late nineteenth century, an Iranian doctor surmised, "[T]he prostitute carries the poison of this dangerous disease [syphilis], and death is considered the best end to it."¹⁹⁷ By the mid-twentieth century, syphilis and gonorrhea were common afflictions among Iranians, for whom condom use was both costly and a social stigma.¹⁹⁸ Gonorrhea in particular was a cause of much concern, for it potentially caused sterility and affected young couples hoping to expand their families.¹⁹⁹ Moreover, women of all social classes were affected by rising VD rates. Not only were increasing numbers becoming infected by their husbands (having extra-marital sex), but children were also being born with syphilis-related disabilities.²⁰⁰ "To put the problem of VD in

Floor explains, "In fact, venereal disease (*bimariha-yi jeldi*) was rampant in Iranian cities. It was estimated, for example, that 20–40 percent of the entire population of Tehran was affected. It may have been less prevalent in the rural areas." See Floor, pp. 261–262.

¹⁹⁵ Firoozeh Kashani-Sabet, "The Politics of Reproduction: Maternalism and Women's Hygiene in Iran, 1896–1941," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 37, no. 1 (Feb. 2006): p. 14. The most common venereal diseases of the pre-revolutionary era, specifically the late 19th century until the mid-1950s, were syphilis and gonorrhea, both of which Iranian doctors could not distinguish until the end of the 19th century (neither did the Europeans). See Floor, "Venereal Disease in Iran (1855 – 2005): A Public Affair," pp. 260–261.

¹⁹⁶ Syphilis was reported to have spread in Iran's urban areas, affecting 20 to 40 percent of the population and increasing in villages. According to Cyrus Schayegh, it was believed that the increasing rates were due to European armies in World War I who were having sexual relations with prostitutes. See Cyrus Schayegh, "A Sound Mind Lives in a Healthy Body': Texts and Contexts in the Iranian Modernists' Scientific Discourse of Health, 1910s–40s," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 37, no. 2 (May 2005): p. 173.

¹⁹⁷ Kashani-Sabet, "The Politics of Reproduction: Maternalism and Women's Hygiene in Iran, 1896–1941," p. 13.

¹⁹⁸ Floor, "Venereal Disease in Iran (1855–2005): A Public Affair," p. 269.

¹⁹⁹ Floor, *A Social History of Sexual Relations in Iran*, p. 389.

²⁰⁰ Kashani-Sabet, "The Politics of Reproduction: Maternalism and Women's Hygiene in Iran, 1896–1941," p. 17.

perspective,” said investigative reporter Hedayatollah Hakim-Olahi, “three hundred thousand inhabitants of Tehran, or forty percent of its population, had VD in 1946.”²⁰¹

Concerns over the spread of VD were especially high among soldiers, whose leaders blamed prostitutes for spreading venereal infections among their officers.²⁰² According to Willem Floor, the Pahlavi government attempted in 1933 to register the prostitutes themselves in *Shahr-e No*, while also threatening to banish brothels and arrest any officer found with a prostitute.²⁰³ In October 1933, it was reported that a law was passed, though not signed by the shah, to make brothels illegal and have them shut down in three months’ time. These regulations required prostitutes to carry identification with their signature and the date of their last hospital visit. This order was soon revoked. It was only in 1941 that a parliamentary-approved law on the prevention of venereal and contagious diseases was passed; however, it was, evidently, poorly enforced due to lack of funding and training.²⁰⁴ By the 1960s, the number of venereal diseases had not abated. According to a 1963 report, venereal disease cases were as high as eighty percent in rural areas.²⁰⁵

The Pahlavi-era method of regulation for prostitution was shaped, to some extent, by European contagious disease legislation and influenced by public health regulatory

²⁰¹Hedayatollah Hakim-Olahi was an investigative reporter who based his findings on hospital data in the report, *Ba Man beh Shahr-e No Biyaad/Come with Me to Shahr-e No*. Floor refers to his report on VD as well as others, in said article. Quoted in Floor, “Venereal Disease in Iran (1855-2005): A Public Affair,” p. 269.

²⁰²Floor, “Venereal Disease in Iran (1855-2005): A Public Affair,” pp. 268-270. See also Cyrus Schayegh, *Who is Knowledgeable is Strong* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009), p. 140.

²⁰³ Floor, *A Social History of Sexual Relations in Iran*, p. 386.

²⁰⁴ Ibid., p. 388.

²⁰⁵ Ibid., p. 391.

measures enacted by European and Ottoman governments during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. In the nineteenth century, a policy of “regulationism” of prostitution commenced in continental Europe and spread throughout the British colonies. As Muge Ozbek has observed, “The regulationist regimes targeted prostitutes, not their clients, as the primary conduits of venereal disease within a gender-biased discourse of social hygiene.”²⁰⁶ These policies were justified as pragmatic responses “to the threat of venereal diseases and the problems of security and social order.”²⁰⁷ European governments began abandoning policies of toleration in favor of regulationism—save Victorian-era Britain—and legalized prostitution by “allowing brothels legal or quasi-legal status and giving prostitutes special licenses.”²⁰⁸

Regulatory policy in general meant registering prostitutes, mandatory health examinations, and administrative surveillance.²⁰⁹ Ozbek contends, “The existence of prostitution was accepted as a ‘necessary evil’ that should be tolerated as toleration allowed the state stricter control of prostitutes in order to protect public health and social order.”²¹⁰ For example, in the late 1870s, the Turkish municipal government initiated a policy of requiring prostitutes to carry unique identity cards, which designated their

²⁰⁶ Muge Ozbek, “The Regulation of Prostitution in Beyoglu (1875-1915),” *Middle Eastern Studies* 46, no. 4 (July 2010): p. 555.

²⁰⁷ Ibid.

²⁰⁸ Ibid.

²⁰⁹ See Jo Doezeema, “Loose Women or Lost Women? The Re-emergence of the Myth of White Slavery in Contemporary Discourses of Trafficking in Women,” *Gender Issues* 18, no. 1 (January 1, 2000): pp. 23-50.

²¹⁰ Ozbek, p. 555.

special status among the general population. Brothels were also obliged to register as licensed businesses with municipal commissions.²¹¹

Across continental Europe, the regulation of prostitution was initially based on concerns over the spread of sexually transmitted infections among the armed forces in the nineteenth century. In France, Napoleon I ordered the inspection of prostitutes following his armies in an attempt to control venereal diseases.²¹² During France's Second Empire, his step-grandson and nephew, Napoleon III, ordered the establishment of a national registry of prostitutes and that their health be regularly inspected.²¹³ In Victorian England, vagrancy laws criminalized prostitution. Certain behavior considered as morally unacceptable—believed to be the conduct of “fallen women,” or women who were perceived as social outcasts and sexual deviants—was outlawed in 1824. If prostitutes and beggars were caught idle or acting disorderly in public, they were charged with vagrancy. In such cases, punishment was one month of hard labor; in other cases, prostitutes were sent to Anglican penitentiaries for social reform.²¹⁴ Nascent social purity campaigns pushed for the abolition of prostitution and deviant sexual acts, as they were claimed to be an affront to family values and led to widespread social corruption.²¹⁵

²¹¹ Ibid., p. 557.

²¹² Mary Gibson, *Prostitution and the State in Italy, 1860-1915* (Rutgers, NJ: Rutgers, the State University, 1986), p. 24.

²¹³ “France, Second Empire,” *Encyclopedia of Prostitution and Sex Work*, vol. 1, ed. Melissa Hope Ditmore (Westport: Greenwood Press, 2006), p. 171.

²¹⁴ Britain's Vagrancy Act of 1824 found that “every common prostitute wandering in the public streets...and behaving in a riotous or indecent manner...shall be deemed an idle and disorderly person.” See Lynda Nead, *Myths of Sexuality: Representations of Women in Victorian Britain* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell Publishing, 1990), p. 115.

²¹⁵ Mary Lyndon Shanley, *Feminism, Marriage, and the Law in Victorian England* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), p. 92.

In 1864, the British Parliament passed the Contagious Diseases Acts intending to curb the spread of sexually transmitted infections in the military.²¹⁶ The Acts led to arbitrary police arrests and compulsory medical examinations of women to check for venereal disease. Following the repealing of these Acts, British military and civilian officials introduced a series of restrictions that recognized women as “disloyal conduits of sexual infection, and men in the armed forces as their victims.”²¹⁷ Worried that sexually transmitted infections would reach its troops stationed in British colonies and naval bases, the British government encouraged Singapore, the capital of the British Straits Settlements and a main British naval base in East Asia, to legalize a system of segregation and isolation of Japanese and Chinese prostitutes. The ordinance was designed to protect British troops from the “ravages of uncontrolled sexually transmitted diseases.”²¹⁸

For the Pahlavi state, regulation of prostitution involved policing prostitutes’ behavior; in lieu of scrutinizing their customers or addressing the subject of male promiscuity, the authorities regarded prostitutes with suspicion and thus subject them to

²¹⁶ Opposing public campaigns were launched to extend and repeal the Contagious Diseases Acts. Proponents of the Acts sought to extend its provisions to the civilian population while repeal organizations argued that the Acts were gender-biased, effectively demonstrating the double standards between men and women. Suspected of spreading venereal disease, women underwent mandatory health checks only to be quarantined for several months if they were found carrying a venereal disease. By 1886, the Acts were repealed, as a result of efforts by moralist and feminist organizations concerned about human rights violations. See Judith Walkowitz, *Prostitution and Victorian Society: Women, Class, and the State* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980); Mary Poovey, *Uneven Developments: The Ideological Work of Gender in Mid-Victorian England* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988): p. 199; Margaret Hamilton, “Opposition to the Contagious Diseases Acts, 1864-1886,” *Albion: A Quarterly Journal Concerned with British Studies* 10, no. 1 (Spring 1978): pp. 14-27.

²¹⁷ Phillippa Levine, *Prostitution, Race and Politics: Policing Venereal Disease in the British Empire* (London: Routledge, 2003), p. 162.

²¹⁸ James Francis Warren, *Ah Ku and Karayuki-san: Prostitution in Singapore, 1870-1940* (Singapore: Singapore University Press, 2003), p. 104.

mandatory health examinations. Prostitutes were quarantined in a red-light district, where police supervision could be conducted in specific sites.²¹⁹ To continue working in the sex industry, prostitutes were ordered by the Ministry of Health to get monthly medical checkups and procure identity cards.²²⁰ However, the medical examinations of prostitutes were not conducted regularly.²²¹ In any case, underlying Pahlavi policy was the protection of public health by curtailing the spread of sexual disease among prostitutes and *not* among their customers.²²² These efforts were reasoned as necessary measures to control the “necessary evil” of prostitution and thus considered pragmatic. Remarkably, absent in this policy was encouraging preventive health measures, such as condom usage, among the general public.²²³

²¹⁹ Hakim-Olahi, *Ba Man beh Shahr-e No Biyaid*, vol. 2, pp. ii-iv. Quoted in Floor, *A Social History of Sexual Relations in Iran*, pp. 390-391. Floor mentions this 1946 book by Hakim-Olahi, who implored the Shah’s government to contain the syphilis outbreak in Tehran. Hakim-Olahi recommended that the red-light district be relocated to a new site under direct police and public health provision. Prostitutes and their homes would be examined daily and would require health cards.

²²⁰ Floor, *A Social History of Sexual Relations in Iran*, p. 277. As researched by Floor, a 1945 article in *Mard-e Emruz* newspaper argued that Iran should follow the Turkish example of “placing prostitutes under police control for public health reasons.” The article based its arguments on permitting prostitution and temporary marriage as “sexual outlets for males.” Ibid., pp. 389-390.

²²¹ Ibid., p. 392.

²²² There were plans to conduct a national survey of the spread of syphilis. According to the 1949 *Report on Seven-Year Development Plan for the Plan Organization of the Imperial Government of Iran*, the government intended to conduct a survey to determine the incidence of syphilis in a “more vigorous attack upon venereal disease.” Public health officers estimated that for different cities and villages, the percentage of infection ranged from 20 to 90 percent. Overseas Consultants, *Report on Seven-Year Development Plan for the Plan Organization of the Imperial Government of Iran* (Tehran: n.p., 1949), p. 61.

²²³ For information about the concerted efforts to blame prostitutes in Iran for venereal disease, see Cyrus Schayegh, “Criminal-Women and Mother-women: Sociocultural Transformations and the Critique of Criminality in Early Post-World War II in Iran,” *Journal of Middle East Women’s Studies* 2, no. 3 (Fall, 2006): pp. 5-6. Kashani-Sabet includes one exceptional, “forward-thinking” instance when an Iranian doctor contributed to a hygiene journal, suggesting that infected persons use condoms. However he dismissed, in part, the method, stating that it was not a completely trustworthy method. He also did not specify if both men and women should use condoms. See Kahsani-Sabet, “The Politics of Reproduction: Maternalism and Women’s Hygiene in Iran, 1896-1941,” pp. 17-18.

Regulation of Prostitution during Muhammad Reza Shah Pahlavi Reign (1941-1979)

While Mohammed Reza Pahlavi was in power, the regulation of prostitution became integrated into the modernization reform agenda of the White Revolution. Earlier, in 1949, Mohammed Reza Shah Pahlavi announced that his goal as king was “the restoration of dignity and a better life to the people of Iran.”²²⁴ By the early 1960s, he had translated “a better life” as progress and development of the nation in a six-point executive order outlining the government’s objectives and addressed them to the Iranian people.²²⁵ A few years after, state-administered land and cultural reforms commenced. The reforms ostensibly were also designed to improve Iranian women’s status.²²⁶ This entailed eliminating illiteracy, extending suffrage rights to women, revamping public health policy, and setting up vocational training programs for poorer women. Initially, these progressive reforms did not address prostitution or include social welfare programs for female prostitutes. Princess Ashraf Pahlavi²²⁷ figure-headed a program funded by the government’s Fourth Development Economic plan to provide educational assistance and training for a small number of female prostitutes in the late 1960s and early 1970s.²²⁸ By

²²⁴ Kurush Shahbaz, “Iran’s White Revolution,” *World Affairs* 126, no. 1 (Spring 1963): p. 18.

²²⁵ Shahbaz, “Iran’s White Revolution,” p. 19. In this executive order, the Shah asserts the government’s improvements in state infrastructure through programs focusing on economic development, progress, anti-corruption, and public cooperation.

²²⁶ Shireen Mahdavi, “Women and the Shii *Ulama* in Iran,” *Middle Eastern Studies* 19, no. 1 (Jan. 1983): p. 17.

²²⁷ Princess Ashraf Pahlavi was the twin sister of Muhammad Reza Pahlavi. She is a highly contested political figure from the Pahlavi regime, especially for her involvement in Iran’s 1953 coup d’état. A self-described women’s rights and human rights activist, she has written two memoirs in English, *Faces in a Mirror: Memoirs in Exile* (1980) and *Time for Truth* (1995). During the state-administered reforms of women’s status of the Pahlavi dynasty, she became president of the High Council of Women’s Organizations of Iran (*Shura-ye Aliye Jamiyat-e Zanan Iran*). After the High Council dissolved in 1966, Ashraf became founder and president of the Women’s Organization of Iran (WOI). See Paidar (1995).

²²⁸ Floor, *A Social History of Sexual Relations in Iran*, p. 265. The Fourth Development Plan was implemented from 1968-73. For more information on the development programs of the Shah’s White

improving their literacy and teaching them domestic trades, such as sewing, the aim was to enable trainees to return to society as functional, socially accepted citizens.²²⁹

Nevertheless, these policy measures did little to break the cycles and conditions of poverty in which they lived.²³⁰ Khosrou Mansourian, a former social worker who contributed to official reports on living conditions at *Shahr-e No*, contends that these reform programs did not significantly ameliorate the conditions of poverty nor did they improve prostitutes' literacy rates.²³¹ According to one report, prostitutes who attended vocational workshops had left the red-light district only to continue the same activities in other parts of Tehran.²³²

The Brothels of Shahr-e No

Uneven socio-economic development in the 1960s and 1970s fueled a growing city population in which giant slums popped up to match the urban construction boom.²³³

The influx of rural migration fueled by Iran's demands for domestic, industrial

Revolution era, see Afsaneh Najmabadi, *Land Reform and Social Change in Iran* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1987); Keith Watson, "The Shah's White Revolution-Education and Reform in Iran," *Comparative Education* 12, no. 1 (Mar. 1976): pp. 23-36.

²²⁹ Ibid., p. 264.

²³⁰ Indeed, there were efforts by the opposition Tudeh party to confront prostitution. The Tudeh-led Democratic Association of Women (DAW) adopted a 1946 declaration of aims and objectives in which "the struggle against prostitution and moral decadence" was addressed. It is not clear, however, what practical measures were taken to confront prostitution. See Paidar, *Women and the Political Process in Twentieth-century Iran*, p. 125.

²³¹ Khosrou Mansourian, interview by Kristin Soraya Batmanghelichi, New York, November 15, 2011.

²³² Floor, *A Social History of Sexual Relations in Iran*, p. 265.

²³³ Najmabadi, "Iran's Turn to Islam: From Modernism to a Moral Order," *Middle East Journal* 41, no. 2 (Spring, 1987): p. 213.

development meant that a thriving sex industry grew to cater to the labor force.²³⁴ Especially in poorer quarters of Tehran, prostitution was becoming rampant.²³⁵ Alongside this wave flourished a sexual vocabulary about women in the sex trade; for the word prostitute, the terms *jendeh*, *fahesheh*, *rouspigar*, and *zan-e marufe* were all variants of a gendered terminology primarily dependent on male promiscuity and the demand for paid sex.²³⁶ At the time, red-light districts were unspoken enclaves located not only in the capital but also in provincial cities such as Abadan, Bandar Abbas, Ahvaz, Esfahan, and Shiraz. Save Tehran's district, most prostitution areas were located on the outskirts of cities and had "virtually no street lights at all, red or otherwise," notes Kamran Talatoff.²³⁷

The "toilet" of Taleghani's day was once known colloquially by the general term *Shahr-e No* or "New City." These designated spaces of sexual transaction and transgression were nominally accepted, albeit not discussed candidly. Despite this reticence, there was no denying the tacit acceptance and presence of prostitution in Iranian society. For the most famous of the *Shahrha-ye No* (New Cities) was located in

²³⁴ Floor, *A Social History of Sexual Relations in Iran*, p. 263. Although this is beyond the scope of this paper, I would like to highlight that scholars such as I Valentine Moghadam have written about the capitalist mode of production's influence on women's work in Iranian society. For information related to the historical industrialization of Iran from the late Qajar period to the Pahlavi regime, see Valentine Moghadam's article "Hidden from History? Women Workers in Modern Iran," *Iranian Studies* 33, no. 3/4 (Summer - Autumn, 2000): p. 380. Moghadam states, "In the late Qajar period, Iran experienced a slow transition from a pre-industrial, traditional, and predominantly feudal society and economy to one where capitalist relations were emerging along with the appearance of modern factories. Issawi's economic history of Iran (Issawi, 1971) documents the kinds of factories that were built during this period, including many that failed (e.g., Issawi, 1971: 47 and chapter 6)."

²³⁵ Floor, "Venereal Disease in Iran (1855-2005): A Public Affair," p. 263. This is also verified in Paidar, *Women and the Political Process in Twentieth-century Iran*, p. 41.

²³⁶ Ibid., p. 263.

²³⁷ Kamran Talatoff, *Modernity, Sexuality and Ideology in Iran: The Life and Legacy of Popular Female Artists* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2011), p. 57.

what is now central Tehran —its name differentiated from other brothel districts by the terms *Qal'eh* (fort or castle) *Shahr-e No* or *Qal'eh Zahedi*, a name attributed to a Pahlavi statesman and general Fazlollah Zahedi.²³⁸

By the mid-1960s, *Qal'eh*²³⁹ *Shahr-e No* became a designated heterotopic space —separate from Iranian society, yet integrated in the underbelly of public life. In Foucault's analysis of space, heterotopia is a philosophical concept of "other" spaces, meaning relational spaces constructed by societies to house, contain, and deal with "otherness."²⁴⁰ When space is perceived as heterotopic —in the case of prisons, nursing homes, or brothels, for instance— the site can function as both an escape from a society's real self and also an illusion of its best self. And in this heterotopic domain, those bodies considered weak, undesirable, vulnerable, or "in crisis" remain separate from normative society.²⁴¹ As a physical site of exclusion, it is generally reserved for individuals in a state of crisis, such as adolescents and the elderly. Foucault distinguishes brothels as an "extreme type of heterotopia."²⁴² The contradictions and dualities of these ideal selves become evident once these sites are investigated for their sustaining of discrimination, gender segregation, and unequal power dynamics. That the sex trade finds itself reforming in new "sites," reappearing in other Tehran districts, means that the same set of

²³⁸ General Zahedi (1897-1963) was Mohammad Mossadeq's former Minister of the Interior and an instrumental coup leader during the October 1952 American and British-led overthrow of Mossadeq. See Ervand Ebrahmanian, "The 1953 Coup in Iran," *Science & Society* 65, no. 2 (Summer, 2001): pp. 182-215. pp. 199-201.

²³⁹ Hereafter I will use the terms *Qal'eh*, *Qal'eh Shahr-e No* and *Qal'eh Zahedi* interchangeably.

²⁴⁰ Michel Foucault, "Of Other Spaces," *Diacritics* 16, no. 1 (Spring, 1986): pp. 22-27.

²⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 24.

²⁴² *Ibid.*, p. 27.

relations—money, power, gender, and ideology—are constantly active in the propagation of an Iranian heterotopia.

In *Shahr-e No*, prostitutes worked and resided in a government-regulated vice district. *Shahr-e No* became a microcosm of urban city life with its own hierarchical system of madams and pimps, cafes, theaters, groundskeepers, police protection and government health examinations. A citadel-like enclosure on Jamshid Street in the Gomrok district (where Razi Square now stands), *Qal'eh Shahr-e No* housed at one time an estimated 4,000 prostitutes²⁴³ living in squalid, cramped quarters.²⁴⁴ From north to south directions, the area was made up of approximately twelve alleyways; from west to east, it covered the space of three major streets—in total a surface area of about 135,000 square meters.²⁴⁵ This town-within-a-city was initially a pastoral haven of the political elite, for during the late Qajar period, the land was known as a retreat for the Qajar royal family.²⁴⁶ At the time, a well-known local named Zal Muhammad Khan reportedly managed the area.²⁴⁷

²⁴³ Floor, *A Social History of Sexual Relations in Iran*, p. 258.

²⁴⁴ Information about Tehran's *qal'eh* or red-light district, in the area known as *Shahr-e No*, is available through various reports, documentaries, newspaper clippings and photojournalist documentation of both underground and state-administered sex trafficking during the Pahlavi-era. A two-part, black and white documentary film, entitled, *Qal'eh*, directed by Kamran Shirdel and produced by the Iran's Ministry of Culture and Art from 1966 until 1980 and the "*Shahr-e No* 1975-1977" exhibition of photographer Kaveh Golestan were referenced for this section. See *Qaleh 1965-1980/Shahr-e No Quarter 1965-1980*, directed by Kamran Shirdel (Tehran: Ministry of Culture and Art, 1980).

²⁴⁵ The north side of the area was located near Farabi Hospital, which is still located south of Ghazvine Square. Surface area estimate provided by Floor, *A Social History of Sexual Relations in Iran*, p. 259.

²⁴⁶ Floor states that *Shahr-e No* was founded in 1881. This cannot be independently verified by Persian sources from the era. *Ibid.*, p. 259.

²⁴⁷ Dr. Mehdi Montazarqha'em, *Rouspigari dar Iran/ Prostitution in Iran* (Tehran: Daneshgah-Ulume Behzisti va Tavanbakshi, 1384/2005), p. 15.



Figure 1: 1969 map of *Qal'eh Shahr-e No* district²⁴⁸

Famed social historian Ja'far Shahri writes that *Shahr-e No* was not yet an identifiable brothel district in the late nineteenth century. But by the turn of the century, it was well known where to find the best prostitutes —women who were considered the cleanest (*paktizetarin*)— and they were located in the district.²⁴⁹ He writes, “Indeed the official number of brothels was 850 of which 4421 prostitution rooms were attributed to the *Shahr-e No* area.”²⁵⁰ The worst prostitution houses, located in *payeen-e shahr* (poorer downtown areas), were found in the areas of Chaleh Meydan and Chaleh Silabi (See Figure 1). Brothels were scattered across Tehran, and their protection by the police

²⁴⁸ Sattareh Farman Farmaian, *Rouspigari dar Shahr-e No Tehran/Prostitution in Tehran's Shahr-e No*, 49/6/25 (Tehran: Amuzeshgah-e Aliehi Khadmat-e Ejtimaii, 1349/ 1970), p. 15.

²⁴⁹ Ja'far Shahri, *Tarikh-e Ijtimai-e Tehran dar Qarn-e 13/ The Social History of Tehran in the 13th Century* (Tehran: Rasa Publishing, 1368/1989), p. 469.

²⁵⁰ *Ibid*, p. 470.

ensured their ongoing business. According to Shahri, police contracts with brothel owners made certain that prostitution rings would survive.

By the time Reza Shah seized power in 1925, the number of brothels ballooned as ownership fell increasingly into the hands of private citizens. The district's reputation worsened as young women, the majority of whom originated from Iran's central provinces, were brought to *Shahr-e No* for sex work.²⁵¹ By the time Mohammed Reza Shah Pahlavi was re-handed his throne by British and American intelligence on August 18, 1953, *Qal'eh Shahr-e No* was already a well-known local institution. The area gained its "citadel" status around 1958 once national Chief of Police Fazollah Zahedi (who later became Iran's 63rd prime minister) ordered the construction of a brick wall around *Qal'eh Shahr-e No*'s premises to separate the prostitutes from the rest of Tehran society.²⁵² By this very act, *Shahr-e No* becomes a designated heterotopic space—separate from Iranian society, yet integrated in the underbelly of public life as a government-regulated red-light district.

²⁵¹ Floor, *A Social History of Sexual Relations in Iran*, p. 263. It is doubtful that these young girls and women were brought into the district of their own volition. Najmabadi wrote a seminal book on the 1905 raiding of villages, in the Quchan province, where young girls were sold into sex slavery by villagers who had trouble paying their taxes. Other girls were reportedly stolen by Turkmen tribes. The event caused a public outcry after the villagers attempted to seek help from the parliamentary government to no avail. See Afsaneh Najmabadi, *The Story of the Daughters of Quchan* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1998).

²⁵² Ja'far Shahri, *Tehran-e Qadim* (Tehran: Moein Publishing, 24 Azar 1376/December 24, 1997). This five-volume work by Shahri (1914-1994) offers a social history of Tehran during the late 19th mid-20th centuries. More on Shahri's life can be found in the chapter "Ja'far Shahri" in Abbas Milani's *Eminent Persians: The Men and Women Who Made Modern Iran 1941-1979*, pp. 893-898.

Reporting on Life inside Shahr-e No

Although the literature on the conditions of brothel life post-Revolution is scarce,²⁵³ pre-revolution research was substantive as academics and fieldworkers from social and public health sectors investigated and regulated the conditions of *Qal'eh* prostitutes. A social worker by the name of Sattareh Farman Farmaian²⁵⁴ published a groundbreaking report in 1969 on the conditions of prostitutes of *Qal'eh Shahr-e No* during the Pahlavi period.²⁵⁵ Farman Farmaian's report is not only important for the descriptions of *Qal'eh* daily life, but it also provides sociological details about the

²⁵³ Since 1979 when prostitution was banned, there are very few sources in Persian about the extent to which prostitution has spread in Iran. Independent scholars, both lay and professional, have commented about the taboo nature of this topic and thus it is unlikely that their writings would have passed government censors in the publication sector of the Ministry of Islamic Culture and Guidance. According to Tehran-based NGO S.P.A.S.D.I. director Mansourian, Sattareh Farman Farmaian wrote the only comprehensive study of Tehran's *Shahr-e No* to date. Additionally, there are available blog posts about the history of the red-light district. See "Shahr-e No: Mazhar-e Fesad dar Qabl az Engelab/Shahr-e No: The Symbol of Moral Corruption before the Revolution," *Tahrir-e Moaaser-e Iran*, 22 Ordibehesht 1387/ May 11, 2008, accessed November 21, 2011, <http://bahman18.blogfa.com/post-11.aspx>. It is worth noting that the opening lines of this article commence with a discussion about American and English colonialism and the decadent culture that it encourages in their colonies. The author argues that English and Americans in Iran also promoted this kind of corruption and decadence through the establishment of this brothel district, which, according to the article, took place during Muhammad Ali Shah Qajar's reign. See "Shahr-e No," *Ahari Qorbat-Neshin* (blog), August 9, 2011, accessed July 1, 2012, <http://aharii.wordpress.com/2011/08/09/%D8%B4%D9%87%D8%B1%D9%86%D9%88/>. See also Payvand, "Photos: Tehran's brothel district Shahr-e-Noh 1975-77 by Kaveh Golestan," <http://payvand.com/blog/blog/2010/12/10/photos-tehrans-brothel-district-shahr-e-no-1975-77-by-kaveh-golestan/>.

²⁵⁴ Sattareh Farman Farmaian is often praised as the "Mother of Social Work" in Iran. A memoir of her life, co-authored by Dona Munker, is found in *Daughter of Persia: A Woman's Journey from Her Father's Harem Through the Islamic Republic* (New York: Doubleday, 1992). Born and raised into a large, aristocratic family in Tehran, she finished her university education in social work at University of Southern California (She was the first Iranian graduate of USC). Thereafter, she returned to Iran to establish in 1958, with the Shah's approval, Iran's very first School of Social Work. At the time, there was no word for the term "social work," so Farman Farmaian invented the term *madadkar*, meaning "one who helps." *Daughter of Persia: A Woman's Journey from Her Father's Harem Through the Islamic Republic*, p. 211. As a critic of both the Pahlavi regime and Khomeini, she was arrested by revolutionary forces in 1979 and soon immigrated to the United States. She died in May 2012.

²⁵⁵ Farman Farmaian, *Rouspigari dar Shahr-e No-e Tehran/Prostitution in Tehran's Shahr-e No*, 49/6/25, especially pp. 17-24. Her work is also referenced in interviews I conducted in the summer of 2011 in Tehran. In an interview with sociology Professor Shirin Ahmadnia, she verified the prominence of her work. Shirin Ahmadnia, interview by Kristin Soraya Batmanghelichi, personal interview, Tehran, Iran, July 3, 2010.

prostitutes and their living conditions. After conducting interviews with 1,548 sex workers, she compiled data on the prostitutes' living conditions and sex work, some of which included their awareness of sexual intercourse, prophylactic usage, marriage status, and even spending habits.²⁵⁶

Taking cues from prostitution discourse in America —many of her theoretical sources are based on publications from the American Social Health Association²⁵⁷— Farman Farmaian provided what is still considered to be the most in-depth analysis of the conditions of prostitution inside *Qal'eh*. Funded by the *Vezerat-e Keshvar* (Ministry of Interior), Farman Farmaian investigated five locations where sex workers were prevalent —the largest section of this report is dedicated to conditions inside *Qal'eh Shahr-e No*.²⁵⁸ Most of this research documents prostitutes working on the streets, in restaurants and bars, residing in the *Qal'eh*, or based in private brothels spread throughout the city. At the time of the report's publication, prostitution was specific criminal offense in the Pahlavi penal code.²⁵⁹

²⁵⁶ Ibid., p. 60.

²⁵⁷ The American Social Health Association (ASHA), now called the American Sexual Health Association, is a non-profit organization dedicated to heightening public awareness about sexual health, including providing information about sexual rights, STDs, and health care providers. Although established in 1914 to control and prevent venereal diseases, drug addiction, and prostitution, by the 1960s, ASHA expanded its programs to include treating and rehabilitating drug addicts. See “American Social Health Association Records, 1905-2005,” Social Welfare History Archives, University of Minnesota Libraries, 2002, accessed December 10, 2011, <http://special.lib.umn.edu/findaid/xml/sw0045.xml>.

²⁵⁸ Other sites Farman Farmaian researched included: public streets; houses outside of *Qal'eh Shahr-e No*; night entertainment spots; discotheques in the southern Tehran; and in *qowdha* (holes), garbage dumps which appeared more like slums, based in south of Tehran. Prostitutes lived and worked in some of the deep crevices of the *qowdha*. Ibid., pp. 22-23.

²⁵⁹ Although there was no law criminalizing prostitution, there was a Pahlavi- era law criminalizing acts committed against social morality. According to section 3, Article 211 of the *Qanoun-e Mojazat-e Ommumi* (Pahlavi Criminal Code), ratified in 1924, the law stipulates, “Any person who participates in an act, which is against social morality, will be imprisoned from one month to one year, or will be fined from 25 to 500 tomans.” Adultery, homosexuality (man having sex with men), rape, and incest were treated as

Living Conditions inside Brothel District

Qal'eh Shahr-e No did not appear to be any lover's paradise. Black and white photographs of war photojournalist Kaveh Golestan provide some powerful images of the conditions captured inside the "citadel." Golestan famously remarked, "I want to show you images that will be like a slap in your face to shatter your security. You can look away, turn off, hide your identity like murderers, but you cannot stop the truth. No one can."²⁶⁰ Women resided in cramped quarters, assigned to single rooms in houses that had about six to seven rooms each. Every house typically had a *hayat* or courtyard.²⁶¹ There are mixed reports on the length of time women resided in this district or even if the "citadel" was more like a work-site than living compound.²⁶² Described as a "waste ground or public toilet," conditions inside the compound were so grim that one report described a pile of rotting, post-coital tissues left alone in a *hayat* (courtyard).²⁶³

crimes, punishable by death in Section 3, Article 207. See *Qanoun-e Mojazat-e Ommumi*, 1304/1924, Section 3, Article 207, 211.

²⁶⁰ Quoted in Payvand, "Photos: Tehran's Brothel District *Shahr-e No* 1975-77 by Kaveh Golestan," Payvand.com, December 10, 2010, accessed December 12 2012, <http://payvand.com/blog/blog/2010/12/10/photos-tehrans-brothel-district-shahr-e-no-1975-77-by-kaveh-golestan/>.

²⁶¹ See Farman Farmaian, *Rouspigari dar Shahr-e No-e Tehran/Prostitution in Tehran's Shahr-e No*, 49/6/25, p. 14.

²⁶² One researcher in particular, Khosrou Mansourian, whom I discuss later in this chapter, insisted that most prostitutes only worked in the quarters and left the citadel for homes located in surrounding areas. Mansourian, interview by Kristin Soraya Batmanghelichi, Tehran, July 17, 2011.

²⁶³ Vivid images of this district are found in the photo compilation of Masoud Benhoud and Hojat Sepahvand. See *Kaveh Golestan 1950-2003: Recording the Truth in Iran* (Hatje Canz Publishers: Ostfildern, Germany, 2007).



Figure 2: 1969-1970 Farman Farmaian rendition of the concentration of prostitution-related activity in Tehran²⁶⁴

According to Farman Farmaian's study, the area was a dilapidated, hierarchal microcosm wherein social roles were clearly defined among the key figures inside the district. *Sahebs* (male pimps) and *nae'eb khanoms* (madams) were in charge of *Qal'eh*'s management. They confiscated a percentage of the prostitutes' wages and acted as their liaisons to the world outside the district. As detailed in Farman Farmaian's report, both clients and *Qal'eh* management followed certain role-playing and protocols during the sexual transactions.²⁶⁵ A potential customer would enter the *Qal'eh*, and shortly a madam would appear, beckoning him to meet her in one of the houses' *hayats* or come inside the home. Prostitutes would stand in requisite positions; they were often visible from the

²⁶⁴Farman Farmaian, *Rouspigari dar Shahr-e No-e Tehran/Prostitution in Tehran's Shahr-e No*, 49/6/25, p. 25.

²⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 14.

window balconies or sitting near the front door —“as if on display,” recalled Mansourian— for the potential customer.²⁶⁶ When a woman was found appealing to him, a bartering session between the madam and customer ensued.²⁶⁷ After a price was agreed upon, the madam would hand him a token, which he would then give to the prostitute with whom he chose to have sexual relations. The prostitute in turn handed all tokens accumulated at the end of the day to the elder “*Maman*” (madam-figure) of the house. A veteran among the prostitutes and well known by customers, *Maman* would place the token in her leather or nylon purse; by day’s end, the number of tokens were tallied in order to divvy out the sums owed to each prostitute. Moreover, police would confiscate a portion of the madam’s profits because protecting women came at a price.

Women who provided sexual services for male customers charged a daily rate of up to 600 riyals (or 60 tomans),²⁶⁸ were at the sexual service of men.²⁶⁹ Serving some 16,000 men each day, they worked between three to twelve hours per day— some close

²⁶⁶ Mansourian, interview by Kristin Soraya Batmanghelichi, Tehran, July 17, 2011. Khosrou Mansourian was a researcher for Farman Farmaian’s report on *Shahr-e No*.

²⁶⁷ Ibid.

²⁶⁸ According to an online report of currency exchange rates from 1979, one US dollar was equivalent to 70 rials or 7 tomans. See “Iran Currency Exchange Rate History: 1975-2012,” Farsinet.com, accessed July 3, 2012, <http://www.farsinet.com/toman/exchange.html>.

²⁶⁹ There are contesting reports about the daily salary of prostitutes from this period. In an interview, Khosrou Mansourian stated that prostitutes made between 400 and 500 tomans for each session. However, this price counters of a *Qal’eh Shahr-e No* prostitute who was interviewed for the documentary film; she stated that children were prostituted for 40 to 50 tomans per hour. In addition, Willem Floor uses Farman Farmaian’s report to note that the average daily income of a *Shahre- No* prostitute was 743 riyals, a price that is significantly lower than Mansourian’s estimate. It is likely that Mansourian was using 2011 currency exchange rates to estimate their salaries. In October 2011, one US dollar was equivalent to 10,700 rials or 1070 tomans. See Floor, *A Social History of Sexual Relations in Iran*, p. 264. It is also worth noting that whatever money a *Shahr-e No* prostitute earned would be divided according to rent and food expenses, as well as to divided among the madams and other prostitutes residing in each house.

to eighteen hours.²⁷⁰ (Some children were offered at a discounted hourly rate of forty to fifty tomans.)²⁷¹

The Women of Shahr-e No

Young and old women who ended up in *Qal'eh* were primarily from rural areas and poor families; they had minimal literacy and virtually no schooling.²⁷² Sold into the sex trade, many had not given their consent nor had any knowledge they were being trafficked.²⁷³ In some cases, their own husbands and parents tricked them or sold them into prostitution.²⁷⁴ Little girls, as young as six years old, were sold by their parents to traffickers and madams and brought to live and work in the district.²⁷⁵ Some of the older women prostitutes had arrived at *Qal'eh* as divorcees, having had little or no financial support from their families.²⁷⁶

²⁷⁰ Floor, *A Social History of Sexual Relations in Iran*, p. 265.

²⁷¹ The price estimate of children, according to a *Shahr-e No* prostitute, is found in the aforementioned film, "A Documentary about Prostitution in *Qal'eh Shahr-e No*, Tehran," directed by Kamran Shirdel and produced by the Iran's Ministry of Culture and Art from 1966 until 1980. Farman Farmaian also interviewed prostitutes who were younger than age fifteen. See Farman Farmaian, *Rusparigari dar Shahr-e Tehran/Prostitution in Tehran*, 49/6/25, Table 58, p. 93.

²⁷² See Kaveh Golestan 1950-2003: *Recording the Truth in Iran*. For literacy rates of *Shahr-e No* prostitutes, see Farman Farmaian, *Rusparigari dar Shahr-e No-e Tehran/Prostitution in Tehran's Shahr-e No*, 49/6/25, Table 37.

²⁷³ Farman Farmaian, *Daughter of Persia*, p. 301. Farman Farmaian explains, "Many were wives or village girls who had been lured or abducted from their homes and sold into the brothels, so that they were beyond the pale of respectable society and could never return to their families." Ibid., p. 301.

²⁷⁴ Farman Farmaian interviewed 1180 prostitutes and tallied how many were married. In *Shahr-e No*, 893 were married compared to 287 who were single. Farman Farmaian, *Rusparigari dar Shahr-e No-e Tehran/Prostitution in Tehran's Shahr-e No*, 49/6/25, Table 20, p. 63.

²⁷⁵ Khosrou Mansourian, interview by Kristin Soraya Batmanghelichi, personal interview, Tehran, Iran, July 17, 2011.

²⁷⁶ Ibid. I conducted two interviews with Mansourian in July and November 2011 in Tehran and New York, respectively.

Added to the mix of *Qal'eh* denizens were female runaways and orphans, whom certain commentators have said were found and collected from the provinces, raped, and brought to *Shahr-e No* by opportunistic characters, such as Abdelmahmoud Arab and Erbab Jamshid.²⁷⁷ Prostitutes lived alongside children who were conceived from these liaisons and past relationships.²⁷⁸ Throughout the district's history, gigolo-types (both male and female) would ultimately force these women into sexual servitude as compensation for their housing; gigolos held these women against their will and ordered them to pay back debts that they owed either to the gigolos or to their own parents.²⁷⁹

In Farman Farmaian's report, social workers had asked prostitutes their reasons for entering the sex trade. I highlight some of their responses: 572 said they were fooled; 415 were sold; 311 had no guardian or immediate care; 41 had desires for wealth; and 72 answered they became prostitutes for a "pleasure," or *lezat* in Persian, which is neither explained by Farman Farmaian or by the women she interviewed.²⁸⁰ Despite the lack of explanation for their reasons, the report illustrates that there was some dimension of choice in a woman's decision to enter and remain within the sex industry. Long before sex workers' rights initiatives in the mid-1980s pushed for international conventions to

²⁷⁷ "Shahr-e No: Mazhar-e Fesaad dar Qabl az Enqelab/*Shahr-e No*: The Manifestation of Moral Corruption before the Revolution," *Tahrir-e Moaaser-e Iran*, 22 Ordibehesht 1387/ May 11, 2008, accessed November 21, 2011, <http://bahman18.blogfa.com/post-11.aspx>. See also Floor, *A Social History of Sexual Relations in Iran*, pp. 262-263.

²⁷⁸ These relationships also included marriages ending in divorce.

²⁷⁹ *Shahr-e No: Mazhar-e Fesaad dar Qabl az Enqelab/Shahr-e No: The Manifestation of Moral Corruption before the Revolution*, *Tahrir-e Moaaser-e Iran*. This sentiment was also verified by Khosrou Mansourian in November 2011 interview.

²⁸⁰ Farman Farmaian, *Rouspigari dar Shahr-e No-e Tehran/Prostitution in Tehran's Shahr-e No*, 49/6/25, Table 34, p. 75.

include self-determination and state protection of the industry,²⁸¹ their answers reflect the role of self-awareness in the decision-making behind why and how women would reside in *Shahr-e No*. (Another interesting find is that the majority of the prostitutes had minimal awareness of sex: only 157 were aware of what sex was, whereas the remaining 1,389 expressed ignorance.)²⁸²

Intrepid Pari Bolandeh of Shahr-e No

Once *Shahr-e No* became a veritable red-light district, it was guarded by the police and fortified with a wall that permanently demarcated its perimeters. At least two guardsmen stood at *Shahr-e No*'s only entrance on Sohrab Street (now Helal Ahmar Street) and inspected men and women hoping to pass through its gates. It was difficult for prostitutes to leave the premises of their own volition because *Shahr-e No*'s sole entrance was also its only exit,²⁸³ escaping was usually their only recourse to pursuing a life outside the quarter. Prostitutes who had fled were eventually arrested by police, beaten, and sent back to *Qal'eh*.²⁸⁴

²⁸¹ Jo Doezema, "Forced to choose: Beyond the voluntary v. Forced prostitution dichotomy" in *Global Sex Workers*, ed. by Kamala Kempadoo & Jo Doezema (New York: Routledge, 1998), p. 35.

²⁸² Farman Farmaian, *Rouspigari dar Shahr-e No-e Tehran/Prostitution in Tehran's Shahr-e No*, 49/6/25, Table 16, p. 60.

²⁸³ In an August 10, 2011 interview I conducted with 26-year-old Forough A.— whose name has been altered to protect her identity— she recounted a story of a grandfather who, as a teenager, had fallen in love with a young girl living inside *Shahr-e No*. Because this girl could not leave the premises on her own, the young man and a group of his friends entered the district, carrying extra men's clothing. After getting dressed as a young boy, the girl left the "citadel" with them and soon after, the young girl and boy married. Forough A., interview by Kristin Soraya Batmanghelichi, personal interview, Tehran, Iran, August 10, 2011.

²⁸⁴ For information about police tactics see film *Qal'eh Shahr-e No, Tehran*.

There are an untold number of powerful hands participating in economically and materially sustaining this institution, suggesting that political influence and corruption extended deep into the Iranian political system.²⁸⁵ Certain female figures inside *Qal'eh* also attracted attention and received clemency that originated well beyond *Qal'eh*'s domain. Being business savvy, madams were able to invest in business and political opportunities outside *Qal'eh*. One of the most recognized of these madams was a prostitute by the name of "Pari Bolandeh (Pari the Tall)," the catchy moniker of Sakineh Qasemi.²⁸⁶

Nicknames like hers were hard to come by. During Reza Shah Pahlavi's reign, women were not typically referred to by their full names. According to formal custom of the time, women were referred to by their relationships to the closest male relative. *Khanom* (wife) or *dokhtar* (daughter) of *Agha* (Mister) was a more appropriate reference, ensuring that a respectful distance be maintained at all times between *mahram* relations.²⁸⁷ However, state modernization attempts altered many of these customs. Once Reza Shah demanded that Iran westernize itself, through force and legal ramifications, women were ordered to unveil in 1936.²⁸⁸ Prostitutes were exempt from this ordinance

²⁸⁵ This comment about political corruption in *Shahr-e No* was stated by both Fatemeh Sadeghi (the daughter of former Islamic revolutionary judge Khalkhali) and Khosrou Mansourian during our personal interviews. Fatemeh Sadeghi, interview by Kristin Soraya Batmanghelichi, personal interview, Tehran, Iran, October 1, 2011.

²⁸⁶ "Pari Bolandeh Kist?/ Who is Pari Bolandeh?" Mahitaabe, 2010, accessed July 15, 2011, http://mahitaabe.blogspot.com/2010/04/blog-post_25.html.

²⁸⁷ *Mahram* is an Islamic *shari'a* legal terminology that describes kin who cannot have sexual relations or get married as it would be considered both illegal and incestuous. A *mahram* relationship can also be one established by blood, milk, marriage or sexual union. See Jane Khatib-Chahidi, "Sexual Prohibitions, Shared Space and 'Fictive' Marriages in Shi'ite Iran," in *Women and Space: Ground Rules and Social Maps*, ed. Shirley Ardener (Oxford, Bloomsbury, 1997), p. 114.

²⁸⁸ Nashat adds, "After the abdication of Reza Shah in 1941, when the rule prohibiting the veil was abandoned, many women returned to it. But the trend was not completely reversed since the present-day

and allowed to wear the *chador* as a way to distinguish themselves as women who are not chaste. But Pari Bolandeh was a tradition-breaker; she capitalized on this era of state-administered modernist reform. A tall and slender woman, Pari Bolandeh was known for her brazenness in advertising her female employees' sexual services. Originally from Ghazvine, she appeared to have a popular following, having managed brothels from several properties throughout Tehran. Her reach even extended into the field of politics. During the American-orchestrated coup d'état of Prime Minister Mossadegh, Qasemi participated in anti-Tudeh demonstrations, which were organized by Pahlavi state authorities. Pictured demonstrating along with athletes from *zur-khanehs*²⁸⁹ and other prostitutes from *Qal'eh Shahr-e No*, Qasemi publicly chanted "Death to Mossadegh" and the end to his nationalist policies.²⁹⁰

The 1979 overthrow of the Pahlavi regime would mean the swift cessation of Pari Bolandeh's madam activities and political activism. Arrested and tried under the Islamic revolutionary courts, she was executed by a firing squad²⁹¹ on July 12, 1979, along with

chador bears only a remote resemblance to the elaborate veil of yesteryear." See Guity Nashat, "Women in the Islamic Republic in Iran," *Iranian Studies* 13, no. 1/4, Iranian Revolution in Perspective (1980): p. 167.

²⁸⁹ In 1953, one of the most prominent traditional athletes, Ša'bān Ja'fari, was a ringleader of the CIA-financed riots that accompanied the military coup d'état of 1953 against Prime Minister Mohammad Mosaddeq. See "zur-kana," *Encyclopedia Iranica*, August 15, 2005, accessed August 18, 2011, <http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/zur-kana>.

²⁹⁰ Though this photograph cannot be truly verified, a number of online Persian sources have posted a snapshot of what appears to be Pari Bolandeh. In a black-and-white photograph apparently taken the day of the coup d'état, she is photographed along with a group of men, waving a rod in the air as she holds onto a car door. See *Kayhan*, Issue 10700 (20 Dey 1390/ January 10, 2012), front cover.

²⁹¹ The details about her execution are not clear. It was reported by *Kayhan* newspaper that she was killed by firing squad. According to the Omid Foundation of Human Rights, "The Revolutionary Tribunal of Tehran charged Ms. Sakineh Qasemi with 'corruption on earth.' Based on the *Kayhan* report, Ms. Qasemi was executed by a firing squad on July 12, 1980. However, according to the received electronic form, she was hanged in front of the *Shekufeh-ye No* cabaret in Tehran." See Boroumand Foundation, "One Person's Story: Ms. Sakineh Qasemi," Abdorrahman Boroumand Foundation, 2012, accessed August 15, 2011, <http://www.iranrights.org/english/memorial-case--3246.php>.

two other female associates, Saheb Afsari (also known as Soraya Tarkeh) and Zahra Mafi (also known as Ashraf Cheharchesme, or Ashraf Four Eyes).²⁹² Though details of the court proceedings are scarce (and provided the day after the *Kayhan* newspaper announced her execution), it was reported that after several closed meetings, Branch One of the Islamic Revolutionary Court in Tehran found her guilty of administering and abetting the illegal prostitution of girls, deceiving women, operating brothels, and spreading corruption among generations —or, as the judgment read, “corruption on earth.”²⁹³ In the last known photograph of her (Figure 3), taken some time before her execution, she appears downcast, wearing a *chador*.²⁹⁴

²⁹² *Kayhan*, Issue 10755, “Be Hokm-e Dadgahha-ye Enqelab-e Eslami: Seh Zan va Chahar Mard Tirbaran Shodand/ The Islamic Revolutionary Courts Executed 3 Women and 4 Men by Firing Squad,” (21 Tir 1358/ July 12, 1979), front cover. See also Maryam Hosseinkhah, *The Execution of Women in Iranian Criminal Law: An Examination of the Impact of Gender on Laws Concerning Capital Punishment in the New Islamic Penal Code* (New Haven, CT: Iran Human Rights Documentation Center, 2012), p. 28.

²⁹³ Boroumand Foundation, “One Person’s Story: Mr. Monir Taheri,” Abdorrahman Boroumand Foundation.

²⁹⁴ The photograph of “Pari Bolandeh” can be found in the same *Kayhan* article, announcing her execution. See “Be Hokm-e Dadgahha-ye Enqelab-e Eslami: Seh Zan va Chehar Mard Tirbaran Shodand/ The Islamic Revolutionary Courts Executed Three Women and Four Men by Firing Squad,” *Kayhan*, Issue 10755.



Figure 3: *Kayhan* announcement of the execution of Pari Bolandeh, photographed in black *chador*

Male Clientele: Recalling *Shahr-e No*'s Past

For male patrons of *Shahr-e No*, gaining entrance into the brothel district meant access into a somewhat exclusive club of mischief, revelry, and male sexual experience. Although politicians, celebrities, and even clerics were spotted entering *Qal'eh*, male laborers were reportedly the most frequent patrons. (Mansourian disputed this claim, stating that men from various social stratum and political persuasions used *Shahr-e No*'s services.) Married and single male laborers would seek the prostitutes' services because it was claimed—and tacitly accepted—that the laborers' extended periods away from their marital beds needed a relief from this sexual tension.²⁹⁵ According to Mansourian, not all men were granted entrance into the district. A customer's age and masculine appearance often determined admission into the district. At the gates, police officers would check if a male had entered puberty by rubbing their bare hands across his cheek and chin. If he felt

²⁹⁵ Payvand, "Photos: Tehran's Brothel District *Shahr-e-No* 1975-77 by Kaveh Golestan," Payvand.com, December 12, 2010, accessed August 20, 2011, <http://payvand.com/blog/blog/2010/12/10/photos-tehrans-brothel-district-shahr-e-no-1975-77-by-kaveh-golestan/>.

that hair stubble was present, then the customer was given entrance and usage of *Shahr-e No*'s services. Those too young to produce a sign of a beard or any facial hair were turned away.²⁹⁶

In interviews²⁹⁷ with erstwhile male patrons, *Qal'eh* provided an opportune space for a man's sexual rite of passage. From ten interviews conducted with primarily middle-age Iranian men based in Tehran, all of whom were teenagers or in their early twenties at the time of the Revolution, I encountered many diverse explanations for why men would choose *Qal'eh* for sexual experience. At this juncture, it is pivotal that I explain how I collected the research for this section—mostly compiled from personal interviews, newspaper articles, and online blogger accounts of former *Qal'eh* patrons. I conducted interviews specifically on the subject of *Shahr-e No* with ten Iranians (three females and seven males) between the months of June and October in 2011.²⁹⁸ I had met each respondent through word-of-mouth, and all interviews took place in the privacy of their homes.

Among this group of interviewees, I discovered that each could easily recall the coordinates and activities of the district. However, none of the women had ever visited the site and had been instructed by their families never to be seen in such a place for fear of damaging their reputation. It became clear to me that the subject of *Shahr-e No* was

²⁹⁶ Mansourian, interview by Kristin Soraya Batmanghelichi, New York, November 15, 2011.

²⁹⁷ All interviews for this dissertation followed International Review Board regulations, approved by Columbia University and the US Department of Health and Human Services. The purpose of the IRB is to make sure that human research is well planned and ethical. Columbia University has implemented a comprehensive Human Research Protection Program (HRPP) charged with the responsibility of ensuring that all human research studies conducted by Columbia students and staff are conducted ethically and in a manner that promotes the protection of participants in research.

²⁹⁸ The interviewees were Tehran residents and all above the age of forty (except for the interview with thirty-five-year old Farid).

not easily spoken about by people from a wide range of socioeconomic and religious backgrounds. For most of the Iranian men I interviewed, *Shahr-e No* was described as a rite-of-passage —visiting it with other male friends during their youth. However, none of the men admitted being direct patrons of *Shahr-e No*'s services. For some of the respondents (whose names have been altered to protect their identities), their reasoning included the spontaneity and curiosity of youth that would lead one to seek out a *Qal'eh* prostitute. Two respondents claimed that *Qal'eh* prostitutes enabled these men to have their very first sexual experience with women. Jamal, a middle-aged jeweler, admitted that his friends frequently visited the quarters. His father, a pious man from Khomein village, was not aware of his son's activities. However, Jamal's close female relative²⁹⁹ had her suspicions, although she never mentioned them to him. During our interview, she acknowledged finding a doctor's prescription slip for syphilis treatment in his trousers' pocket. At the time, Jamal was fifteen years old, and she presumed that he would not likely have become infected from any sexual relations outside *Shahr-e No*.

In another interview, a male respondent described how a friend's father purchased the services of a *Shahr-e No* prostitute to rid his son of his virginity. As previously mentioned, sexual rite of passage was a common theme expressed in the interviews. Nader, a middle-age computer engineer from East Tehran, recounted that at age fifteen, he accompanied an older group of male friends to *Shahr-e No*. Though Nader insisted he did not personally engage in any sexual activity and was there just for the experience of being there and seeing it, he recounted a story in which a young man fell in love with a prostitute and the lengths traveled to help her escape the premises. For some of the male

²⁹⁹ Because of this sensitive subject, I am using this vague terminology to protect the names and identities of the interviewees and their family members.

interviewees, sneaking around the premises, either alone or with a group of friends, was just enough experience to weave into a nostalgic memory about youth adventure. In an interview, thirty-something Farhad, a web-designer whose older cousins would confide in him stories about their *Shahr-e No* experiences, expressed sympathy for the prostitutes. Farhad argued that the quarter's destruction would mean the prostitutes would soon be forgotten. When I asked him to elaborate, he mentioned that before the revolution the prostitutes had an actual site to work; now their work had dispersed throughout Tehran.

The Demolishing of Shahr-e No

As the tide of Pahlavi dissent culminated in the co-opting of a people's revolution in the name of Ayatollah Khomeini's Islam, lesser-known prostitutes fared no better. Condemnation of women prostitutes swiftly entered riot stages, with angry crowds gathering around *Shahr-e No* within the first days of the Revolution. *Qal'eh's* denouement proved both gruesome and spectacular: After a failed attempt to set fire to the district in November 1978,³⁰⁰ three months later in early February 1979, an angry mob was reported to have attacked *Shahr-e No's* residents, setting the district ablaze after attempts by police and firefighters to quell the riots were unsuccessful. (Mehrangiz Kar claims that the riots were the work of Islamic revolutionary extremists who had come to

³⁰⁰In her memoirs, Farman Farmaian details her role in the November 1978 torching of *Qal'eh*—which, to her surprise, was lauded by Ayatollah Mahmoud Taleghani. Fearing for the lives of the women and children at the welfare center of *Qal'eh*, she and her social work colleagues ran to the district, carrying buckets of water to put out the fire while also insisting that the police and fire stations help. She then realized they had not entered the quarters because “it was better to let the *Qal'eh* burn than to antagonize the ‘beards.’” “Beards” was the nickname for the most fanatical of the clerical supporters who Farman Farmaian witnessed carrying torches and cans of kerosene, intent on “punishing a few miserable women for the sins of the ‘imperialists.’” See Farman Farmaian, *Daughter of Persia*, pp. 301-302.

“destroy the roots of moral corruption.”)³⁰¹ There were two confirmed deaths.³⁰² Soon after, Ayatollah Sadegh Khalkhali —himself notorious for the swift condemnation and execution of political prisoners and activists during his tenure as chief justice of Iran’s first revolutionary courts— denounced the area and ordered bulldozers inside to level the district for its illegal and un-Islamic activities.³⁰³

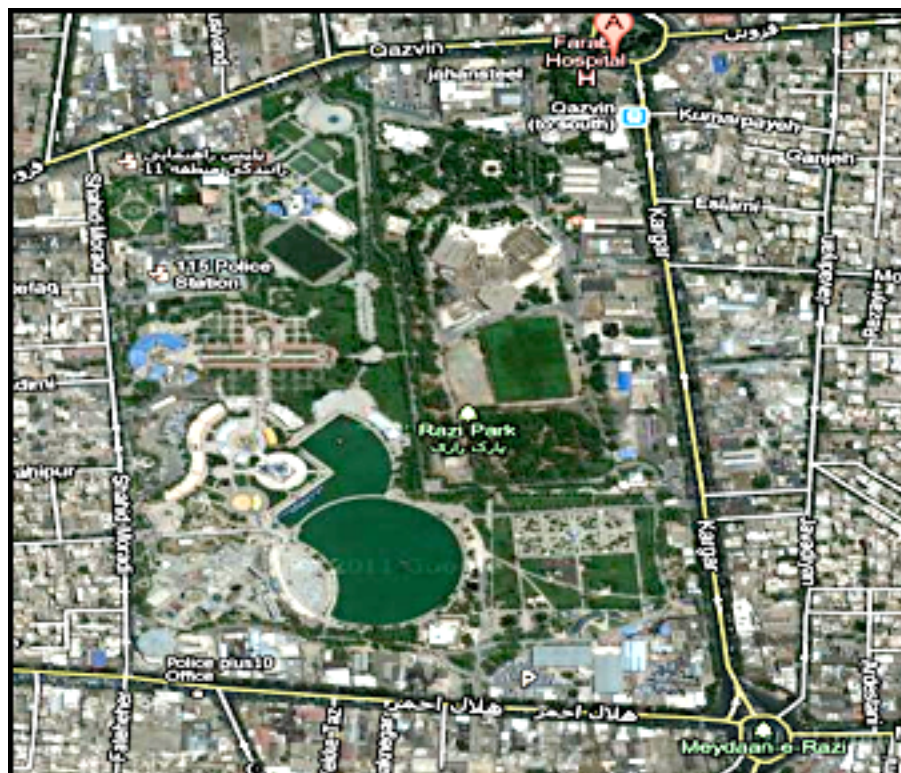


Figure 4: November 2011 aerial view of *Park-e Razi*

³⁰¹ Kar, *Crossing the Red Line*, p. 181.

³⁰² “30 Years Ago on This Day,” Radio Zameh, 8 Bahman 1387/January 27, 2009, accessed September 11, 2011, http://zamaaneh.com/revolution/2009/01/post_218.html. Quoted in *Ettela'at*, “Beh Atash Keshidan-e ‘Qal’eh-ye Shahr-e No’ va Koshtan-e Rouspeyan/Shahr-e No Quarter Set on Fire and Prostitutes Killed,” 9 Bahman 1357/January 29, 1979.

³⁰³ Khalkhali was sworn into office as Head of the Revolutionary Courts on the 24th of Bahman 1357 (February 13, 1979), four days after Iranians mark as the celebration of the Islamic Revolution. For more information about Judge Khalkhali, please consult the following websites: Ahari blogpost, August 9, 2011, accessed September 11, 2011, <http://aharii.wordpress.com/2011/08/09/%D8%B4%D9%87%D8%B1%D9%86%D9%88/>. Article on Khalkhali’s involvement also found in the following online sources: Balatarin, accessed September 11, 2011, <http://balatarin.com/permlink/2011/8/5/2651728>.

Park-e Razi: Cleansing the Site of Prostitution for a Moral Leisure Area

Today, the *Shahr-e No* narrative has faded into the outskirts of public memory. Ask most Iranians under the age of thirty and he or she will likely be puzzled as to the existence and history of these red-light districts.³⁰⁴ However, ask where Gomrok district is located, and more likely this response quickly follows: “It’s near a park!” Prior to 1979, this answer was not possible, as Gomrok was always associated with *Shahr-e No*. Evidently, though the name of Gomrok has not changed, for two generations of Iranians in the Islamic Republic, its name resonates with something else.

In the site that was formerly a red-light district now stands a multi-acre, manicured park known as *Park-e Razi* (Razi Park), which is located in Tehran’s District Eleven. All forty-four hectares (almost 108.7 acres) of *Park-e Razi* essentially cover the former site of *Shahr-e No*, although it bears no physical resemblance to its pre-revolutionary incarnation. Unlike the majority of formerly inhabited lands in Tehran that, after the revolution and the Iran-Iraq war, were heavily developed into office and apartment buildings—for land development has been a lucrative business—this particular area was transformed into a family-friendly leisure and athletics space.³⁰⁵ Its grounds include a cultural exhibition center, a public library, a cinema, the now defunct amusement park of *Shahr-e Bazi* (Play City), and a man-made lake fit with a neon-lit bridge on which park patrons and fishermen can observe swan gondola trips. The park

³⁰⁴ Pahlavi-era movies and novels are two domains in which *Shahr-e No* characters have been sustained in the public memory—yet interviews of former patrons and inhabitants who lived in *Qal’eh*’s surrounding areas offer personal, nonfictional accounts of the social life, networks, and inter-dynamics of the quarter and its inhabitants.

³⁰⁵ For information on the impact of quick urbanization of Tehran city from a study of satellite images of the capital’s urban development, see S.Z. Shahraki, Z. Arzjani, and N. Ahmadifard, “A Systematic Study of the Impact of Urbanization of Tehran City on Agricultural and Garden Land Use,” *Crop Research (Hisar)* 37, no. 1/3 (2009): pp. 307-311.

also hosts a children's playground area, a prayer space and lecture hall, as well as an open-air calisthenics section for public use. From the park's main entrance on Kargar Street, petty businessmen are found sitting on benches with their satchels open, selling snacks and trinkets to passersby. Traditional and fast food restaurants line avenues reaching to the main square, where a statue of Persian medieval scholar and physician Mohammad ibn Zakariya al-Razi peers over a rotunda. *Park-e Razi*'s surrounding area is still relatively poor, surrounded by a mixture of rundown two-story buildings, vacant shopping centers, local banks, and family-operated businesses selling odds and ends.³⁰⁶

The Tehran Parks and Green Space Organization runs most of the capital's eight hundred parks, providing maintenance, landscaping, and beautification services. The organization even produces its own newsletters about park-related topics and the psychological benefits to being park patrons. For instance, it published the article, "The Importance of Green Spaces and its Effect on Human Mentality," praising municipal parks as symbols of heaven and health. They are places where individuals escape to nature for peace, leisure, and relaxation.³⁰⁷ According to this article, visitors frequent parks in order to have calmer thoughts, which are enabled by the psychologically pleasant green colors surrounding them.³⁰⁸

³⁰⁶ Located nearby are *Park-e Khanevadeh* (Family Park) and the miniature Ghazvine Square.

³⁰⁷ "Ahamiyat-e Faza-ye Sabz va Ta'sir-e Un bar Ravan-e Ensan/The Importance of Green Space and its Effect on Human Mentality," Parks and Green Space Organization Tehran Municipality, date unknown, accessed June 26, 2012, <http://parks.tehran.ir/LinkClick.aspx?fileticket=wBH9D6Qm7Uw%3d&tabid=101&mid=481>.

³⁰⁸ Fariba Abdelkhah has studied how municipal parks and gardens, especially in Tehran, offer a public, communal space in which different social groups and classes of society coexist and share in their "favourite consumption and leisure practices," such as picnicking, socializing with friends, family gatherings, sports, and selling crafts. However public parks are also sites on which varied social practices and groups interact and rival one another. Parks are often where local authorities, neighbors, and Revolutionary Guard members observe and, at times, enforce the moral code demanded by the regime. See Abdelkhah, *Being Modern in Iran*, pp. 19-20.

Park-e Razi is however operated by other municipal authorities. Since 2005, it has been uniquely managed by the state cultural organization, *Sazman-e Farhangi Honari Shahr-dari-ye Tehran* (Cultural Arts Organization for Tehran Municipality), which has administrative offices located near a park entrance. The organization describes itself as a “center for cultural activities in Tehran and administrates over 300 cultural centers” across the city.³⁰⁹ As a state institution, it also has its own publishing branch. (For the thirty-second anniversary of the revolution, it commemorated the occasion by publishing a 600-page chronology of revolutionary milestones from state-media sources, which it planned to sell during the anniversary’s demonstrations.)³¹⁰ According to a news report, it had special plans for *Park-e Razi*, transforming it into the “cultural pole of the capital.”³¹¹ Currently, the park hosts art and film exhibitions and offers cultural and religious programs, such as the spring season 2012 lecture series on *hejab* and chastity called “*Gohar-e Efaf*” (The Jewel of Chastity).

³⁰⁹ “Fifty Ambassadors, First Secretaries Guests of Iran Arts Garden-Museum,” Tehran Municipality website, June 26, 2012, accessed July 1, 2012, <http://en.tehran.ir/default.aspx?tabid=77&ArticleId=747>.

³¹⁰ “Comprehensive Chronology of Islamic Revolution Published,” Tehran Municipality website, February 8, 2012, accessed June 14, 2012, <http://en.tehran.ir/ViewArticle/tabid/77/ArticleId/523/Comprehensive-Chronology-of-Islamic-Revolution-Published.aspx>.

³¹¹ “Yek Mohit-e Kamelan Farhangi Baraye Noh Hafte/ A Cultural Environment for 9 Weeks,” *Hamshahri News*, 1388 Tir 22/ July 13, 2009, accessed June 4, 2012, <http://www.hamshahrionline.ir/news-85383.aspx>.



Figure 5: Pedestrian sign at the Kargar Street entrance of *Park-e Razi*, Tehran



Figure 6: Painted car sitting at a side entrance of *Park-e Razi*, Tehran

July 2011



Figure 7: Neon-lit bridge overlooking man-made lake of *Park-e Razi*, Tehran

July 2011

In the last three decades since the formation of the Islamic Republic, the Iranian state has been engaged in the re-invention and calibration of certain monuments and geographic sites into Islamic communal leisure spaces, subsequently expunging from records the pre-revolutionary historical narrative of those particular spaces and objects. Redeveloping a century-old site of prostitution into a familial space is one method of projecting the triumph of Islamic values over the corrupt, symbolic political capital of the Pahlavis formerly embodied in these sites. According to the Islamic Republic's revolutionary narrative, while the Pahlavi state promoted "dens of moral corruption," Ayatollah Khomeini's version of an Islamic state, by contrast, promoted religious and family values.³¹² *Shahr-e No*'s development into a recreational public park is one of many illuminating examples. In its place is a now utopian reconstruction of a historical site which functions in forging a new collective memory and social cohesion through the

³¹² Hamid Naficy, *A Social History of Cinema, Volume 1: The Artisan Era, 1897-1941* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011), p. 260.

remodeling of a landscape into ideologically constructed space. In this site, history can be both erased and re-imagined, in accordance to a particular ideology. This is illustrated in the historical and political narration of *Park-e Razi* in relation to the establishment of the Islamic Republic, which is published on the Cultural-Arts Organization of Tehran Municipality's website. According to the website, an Islamic Revolution³¹³ is praised for transforming the land where *Shahr-e No* once stood into something better:

Historically, this area is one of the important areas of cultural heritage, if one counts the Ghazvin gates, the Garden of Kings, and Sheikh Hadi and Moniriyeh Streets. Before the revolutionary period, the cultural background of this neighborhood was very bleak because of the existence of Jamshid quarter and other profound social problems. However, with the glorious advent of the Islamic Revolution (*Khorshid-e Enqelab-e Islami*) and through the efforts of the municipality, it was transformed from a corrupt area into the biggest leisure and sports center in the city.³¹⁴

Here, the text does not explicitly mention prostitution; instead, the area's former name — Jamshid — is mentioned, which is not a common reference point for Iranians under the age of thirty-five. As a strategy of replacing the pre-revolutionary history by superimposing an Islamic identity and beginning for that site, the illicit past is ostensibly absolved through this process of spatial cleansing. The actual land of *Shahr-e No* transforms into a purported prostitution-free, green space that accommodates families, athletes, and library patrons. In this zone, Islamic values are cultivated and nurtured through the ubiquitous planning of the state. To a certain degree, visiting *Park-e Razi* is unlike visiting other parks spread across the city — it is a domain of the state. Because the

³¹³ Here, the 1979 Revolution is identified as an Islamic revolution, eliminating the existence of any oppositional, secular forces that participated in the fall of the Pahlavi regime.

³¹⁴ "Mo'arefi-ye Manteqe-ye 11/ Introducing District 11," Cultural Arts Organization for Tehran Municipality, date unknown, accessed July 1, 2012, <http://razi.farhangsara.ir/%D9%85%D8%B9%D8%B1%D9%81%D9%8A%D9%85%D9%86%D8%B7%D9%82%D9%87.aspx>.

Cultural Arts organization integrates religious and state programs into the recreational programs that the park offers, the state determines the meaning and content of recreation. *Park-e Razi* offers a new social and spatial reality where Islamic tenets are reinforced and made accessible to the general public. In other words, if a visitor wants to learn about the Revolution or the subject of modesty from the state's perspective, then the park becomes a site where he or she can understand these topics. Hence, visiting *Park-e Razi* involves much more than an escape to nature for the benefits of health and leisure.

The remodeled site is a cursory reincarnation, disguising an attempt to build over a "primary" site for the purposes of dismissing and revising facts about what exactly went on in that location for many generations. As Robert Sack has argued in his discussion of spatiality and social life,

When place, and not only the things in it, is a force-when it influences, affects, and controls-it is a primary place. Primary places involve human actions and intentions and have the capacity to change things. Unlike a secondary place, which can be replaced without remainder by substituting the objects and interactions in its area, a primary place cannot be re-placed. Primary places are delimited, they possess rules about the things to be included and excluded, and they have meaning.³¹⁵

In this theoretical paradigm, *Park-e Razi* is a secondary place. The material fixtures of a children's playground and prayer space are temporary replacements, meant to nurture an Islamic identity ground in piety, family, and Muslim community. Yet, although this new site looks and feels nothing like its predecessor, prostitution, which dominated that space for almost a century, is still a quotidian presence, for transactions for illicit sexual activities are made and conducted in various sections of the park.

³¹⁵ Robert Sack, *Homo Geographicus: A Framework for Action, Awareness, and Moral Concern* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997), p. 32.

Recalling *Shahr-e No*'s Past from Park Residents

Although *Shahr-e No* was demolished, what has remained of this district is alive in the vivid storytelling of older generations and captured in history books and newspaper clippings. To learn more about the social history of the former brothel district and observe the physical transformation that the Gomrok district had undergone, I decided to visit the park and ask Iranians about their knowledge of *Shahr-e No* and of *Park-e Razi*'s past.³¹⁶ In August 2011, I traveled to *Park-e Razi* and conducted eight interviews with visitors.³¹⁷ The park was virtually empty, as it was both Ramadan and very hot. The park is not usually empty, as during the weekend holiday—for Iranians, Thursday and Friday—it is generally packed with families and young people mingling, playing sports, or picnicking.

In *Park-e Razi*, I interviewed a total of six men and two women, whom I met while they were seated on benches at different locations throughout the park. Each person was a denizen of the park's surrounding neighborhoods. The two women interviewees were in their late twenties and early thirties and were both strangers to me and to one another. The men, however, seemed to be acquainted with one another, as each person offered suggestions about the next person with whom I should speak. Of the six men, five were above the age of sixty and informed me that they sat in the park as part of their daily ritual. The last interview I conducted in the park was with a gondola ride attendant who

³¹⁶ I visited the park with a female friend, as my family and I had safety concerns because I was unfamiliar with the area. Moreover, it is not typical for a female—regardless of her age, origin, or religious disposition—to visit parks unaccompanied in Iran. It would invite unwanted attention from strangers, including the park police, who would be curious about my reasons for doing so.

³¹⁷ The interviews took place in the afternoons of Wednesday and Thursday on August 24 and 25, 2011. I spent eight hours each day at *Park-e Razi*.

introduced me to a middle-aged security guard —coincidentally, one who had formerly worked at *Shahr-e No*.

When I inquired individually if they had heard of *Shahr-e No*, they all responded that the park was constructed over its remnants. I spoke with a thirty-year-old mother, who was waiting for her son to finish a game of football. She admitted she was too young to know details about the red-light district; however, she said that prostitutes were known to frequent the park in the early mornings and late evenings now. In one section of the park, canopies shield tables and benches, and certain areas are not well lit. She pointed out that prostitutes and potential customers gather discreetly to arrange meeting times and meeting places.

The people I spoke to offered few personal details about the red-light district; this topic caused uneasiness particularly for the elderly men.³¹⁸ For instance, after animatedly detailing the design layout of the park and describing mischievous activities of young couples in *Park-e Razi*, an elderly, divorced man suddenly lowered his voice when describing the area before 1979. He said, briefly, “Bad things happened here,” and promptly ended our conversation. In other interviews with male park visitors, the details tended to be more illustrative of the illicit sexual conduct —such as men and women engaged in petting and fornication—that they had witnessed while visiting the park. According to the twenty-one-year-old gondola conductor and the security guard who was a worker inside *Shahr-e No*, elderly prostitutes are spotted occasionally in the park, sitting on benches near the man-made lake. The conductor claimed that there was a particular protocol men and women would follow if they sought casual or paid sex: either

³¹⁸ I think that my female gender might have impacted what information male interviewees felt comfortable in sharing with me. Moreover, I realize that the topics of *Shahr-e No* and prostitution are considered taboo and thus not easily broached in public, and among strangers.

would sit on opposite ends of the benches and discreetly flirt while discussing details of potential sexual encounters. When I inquired about these women's identities —i.e., who they were and where they had come from— the men separately told me that, although the majority were young prostitutes, there were some rumored to have worked in *Shahr-e No*. According to their accounts, some women had returned to the site to continue sex work after having difficulty finding employment after the Revolution.³¹⁹

Even despite *Shahr-e No*'s physical destruction and renovation as a park, prostitution has not been eradicated. The discussion of the pre-revolutionary history of *Park-e Razi* and the acknowledgment that prostitutes have not abandoned working in the area provide an important, public counter-narrative to the state's evocation of Islamic family values in the constructing of this park. Clearly, the physical erasure of *Shahr-e No*, which was previously a government-regulated societal landmark and institution for prostitution, has only shrouded the site on which prostitution is practiced. The ongoing presence of prostitution suggests that the renovation of the space to eradicate the sex industry was a cosmetic effort and did not address the socioeconomic factors and conditions under which prostitution is practiced. The Islamic Republic's cultural

³¹⁹ I was not successful in interviewing the females they described as former *Shahr-e No* prostitutes. Thus there is no way to verify that indeed the women were 1) prostitutes or 2) had worked in *Shahr-e No*. I must therefore rely on their words. However, I did seek out additional sources for verification. The park's guards were reticent in verifying the interviewees' claims. After leaving the park, I telephoned the local police, asking for any information about the frequency of prostitution in the area. They did not respond to my requests. Thereafter, I contacted *Khaneh-ye Khorshid* (Sun House), a women's advocacy center and safe-haven for female runaways and addicts located on Shush Avenue in south-central Tehran. The center provides methadone treatment, gynecological and psychological services for women, and provides basic necessities, such as food and clothing. I wanted more information elaborating how prostitution operates in Razi Park. I spoke with one of the volunteer staff-members (who is a university student in social work). She confirmed that in parks located in poorer areas of Tehran, such as Razi Park, prostitution is common. More so, many female addicts temporarily reside in them with their children because of the available facilities, such as the public toilets, and because they have no stable housing. The staff-member did not know if any of the prostitutes were formerly *Shahr-e No* residents. She also was not aware that Razi Park was the former site of *Shahr-e No*.

initiatives to characterize and then monopolize how this particular space transforms are disputed.

Conclusion

This historical narration of Tehran's erstwhile red-light districts and its contemporary manifestations is not meant to identify and thus sensationalize the underworld of a sex industry that now operates openly in a Tehran park. To acknowledge the presence of sex workers in parks offers no radical redirection of the discourse on prostitution and how it operates and is handled in Iran. As I have discussed in an earlier section of this chapter, internationally, there have been varied methods of tolerance and regulation toward prostitution and the people involved in this industry. What is unique about prostitution discourse in contemporary Iran, in relation to *Shahr-e No*, is the politicized, spatial transformation of the erstwhile sites of the sex industry—from brothels catering to male customers to a park for pious, family-oriented patrons. As vestiges of Pahlavi opulence were confiscated and removed from plain-view, so were the dwellings of seedy urban life that operated freely under the Shah's nose. From the ashes of a burned-down red-light district a public park is constructed to represent and symbolize a new course distinct from its pre-revolutionary past. Now promoting religious values, such as chastity and modesty, these green spaces are designed to celebrate spiritual and mental health—in some part, a return to nature. Yet, the elimination of prostitution in this form did not mean the eradication of memory or of illegal sexual interactions between men and women. When intersections of social, cultural, economic, and political factors merge into a zone once demarcated for human

excess, the transformations of that particular space into a pious alternative neither excuse nor deny the existence and continuation of prostitution. Thus far, knowledge of the park's history has not stopped prostitution from continuing.

In the next chapter, I engage further with the discourse of prostitution in the post-revolutionary period, from 1979 until 2008. I follow the destruction of the Pahlavi “citadel” of prostitution and study how a unique re-formulation of illicit sex between men and women appears. I discuss the Islamist state's reform policies, which targeted *Shahr-e No*'s sex workers, who, after 1979, were offered the chance to become useful members of Iran's newly formed Islamic Republic. Although the actual “site” of Taleghani's “toilet” in some manner vanishes, the conditions and circumstances that enable prostitution to proliferate years later suggest something equally troubling—that, within both Pahlavi and Islamist regimes, prostitution is an institutionally and conceptually accepted feature and necessity.

CHAPTER THREE

Post-revolutionary “Prostitution” and its Discontents

*The sex debate provides plenty of fodder for the Islamic Republic’s many enemies, and so turbulent is Iran’s recent history, and so extreme the contradictions, that wherever you turn you are never more than ten feet away from a scapegoat.*³²⁰ – John R. Bradley

Introducing Islamic Reform

As we left off in Chapter Two, the flagship red-light district of Tehran’s *Shahr-e No* was bulldozed in the Revolution’s first days. Three decades later, the manicured *Park-e Razi* now stands in its stead, redeveloped to look nothing like its pre-1979 predecessor. That prostitutes and clientele mingle in this setting is ironic given its modification as a gathering space for families and cultural activities. For many reasons, the sex industry has returned to this site —its eradication an improbable task, even despite the demolition of a den of brothels once known as the “citadel.” What factors have led to the recurring presence of prostitution in this site? The answer to this question lies in the complex historical process in which prostitution is mediated, peculiar to the Islamic Republic’s rehabilitation programs and the Shi’a discourse on human sexuality. Indeed, there have been many adjustments to the definition and mechanisms of prostitution, as the industry has proliferated under the radar. Any examination of the present status of prostitution necessitates a return to 1979, after *Shahr-e No*’s prostitutes find their residence on fire, their fates uncertain.

After the fall of the monarchy, what became of Iran’s prostitutes in the midst of these structural changes? For those accused of *zedd-e arzeshe enqelab-e eslami* (being

³²⁰ John R. Bradley, *Behind the Veil of Vice: The Business and Culture of Sex in the Middle East* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), p. 84.

against Islamic revolutionary values) punishment was severe. Ad-hoc revolutionary courts sentenced intellectuals, activists, writers, madams, and members of the Pahlavi establishment to death.³²¹ As cited in newspaper *Ettella'at*, “Any action that is pleasing to God is valuable; any deed that contradicts God’s command is anti-value.”³²² As Najmabadi explains, “Execution of prostitutes, men and women accused of adultery, drug smugglers as well as drug addicts, are all part of the same campaign to ‘cleanse society,’ and expunge from it all these ‘points of corruption.’”³²³

The standard narrative of this period recounts how the transition in government after the revolution followed a clear break in Iran’s historical trajectory. Scholars point to the return of exiled Ayatollah Khomeini on February 1, 1979 as the marked beginning of major economic, political, and cultural reforms in Iran. As bastions of the Pahlavi state were disassembled, the Supreme Council of the Cultural Revolution³²⁴ began implementing institutional changes that helped construct Iran as an identifiably Islamist nation-state.³²⁵ “Islamic criteria,” as stated in the constitution, became the rubric upon which the state would design and implement new cultural, political, and economic policies.³²⁶

³²¹ Paidar, *Women and Political Process in Twentieth-Century Iran*, p. 345.

³²² *Ettella'at*, December 22, 1998. Quoted in Hammed Shahidian, *Women in Iran: Gender Politics in the Islamic Republic*, vol. 2 (Westport: Greenwood Press, 2002), p. 166.

³²³ Afsaneh Najmabadi, “Iran’s Turn to Islam: From Modernism to a Moral Order,” *Middle East Journal* 41, no. 2 (Spring 1987): p. 215.

³²⁴ Paidar explains, “The Council of the Islamic Revolution which had been set up in the final month of the Revolution by Ayatollah Khomeini presided over the immediate transitional tasks. The revolutionary leadership kept some parts of the pre-Revolutionary state machinery intact and replaced others with the institutions which were conceived during the Revolution.” See Paidar, p. 221.

³²⁵ See Abrahamian (1982), Paidar (1997), Dabashi (2006), and Najmabadi (1991; 1998).

³²⁶ See *Islamic Republic of Iran Constitution*, Article 3, note 12 and 16; Article 4.

In order for the theocratic republic to establish its own institutions, there were radical transformations in Iran's legal, economic, and social structures. Soon powerful *ulama* (Muslim scholars or clerics) re-entered the political fray, after decades of subjugation and exile by the Pahlavi leadership and secret police.³²⁷ Given top leadership and ministry positions, they helped draft the country's constitution and assumed their positions as vice-regents or "heirs to the mantle of the Prophet."³²⁸ "After the Islamic Revolution," writes Ervand Abrahamian, "The clergy had the field to themselves, since recent socioeconomic developments had dissolved the traditional ties between the rural magnates and their clients, between landlords and their peasants, and between tribal chief and their tribesmen."³²⁹ They also helped form a judiciary system staffed by *mujtahids*³³⁰ and local court clerics, which replaced the Pahlavi-era secular court system (with secular university educated judges).³³¹ This judiciary became the legal bastion of the Islamic state, interpreting and applying the Khomeini-approved doctrine of a theocratic government run by a senior-ranking Shi'a *Ayatollah* who holds the position of *Veyalat-e Faqih* (Guardian Jurist). Additionally, the Supreme Judicial Council (which was later unified in the position of the Head of the Judiciary in 1989) directed all courts

³²⁷ State universities and government ministries were closed. The Pahlavi-era Parliament and the Senate were also dissolved during the early years of the post-revolutionary period.

³²⁸ Shaul Bakhash, "The Islamic Republic of Iran, 1979-1989," *The Wilson Quarterly* (1976-) 13, no. 4 (Autumn 1989): p. 54.

³²⁹ Abrahamian, *Iran between Two Revolutions*, p. 536.

³³⁰ "Mujtahid," *Encyclopedia of Islam*, Second Edition, Brill Volume VII, p. 295, column 2. According to the Encyclopedia of Islam, a *mujtahid* is "one who possesses the aptitude to form his own judgment on questions concerning the *shari'a*, using personal effort (*idjtihad* [q.v.]) in the interpretation of the fundamental principles (*uqul* [q.v.]) of the *shari'a*."

³³¹ Mehran Tamadonfar, "Islam, Law, and Political Control in Contemporary Iran," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 40, no. 2 (June 2001): p. 217.

to abide by Islamic-legislation. In 1982, Iran implemented a *shari'a*-based penal code (*Qanoun-e Mojazat-e Eslami*) for an experimental period; punishments were revised in accordance to their specifications in the *Qur'an*.³³² Yet whatever claims to independence, transparency, and rule of law were asserted in the constitution were contradicted by a secretive due process.³³³

According to Paidar, the institutionalization of Ayatollah Khomeini's ideological doctrine faced many setbacks, for "the process of transition entailed a gradual disintegration of the discourse of revolution and the post-revolutionary transitional period became the scene of intense debate over the new culturally authentic and economically and politically independent society, and the place of women within it."³³⁴ In the very first month of this transitional period, brothel districts were immediate casualties. Two days before jubilant celebrants greeted Ayatollah Khomeini at Tehran's Mehrabad airport on February 1, 1979, newspapers printed images of the city's red-light district on fire.³³⁵ At the end of the month, provisional revolutionary courts were established and ordered the demolishing of these vice areas. Places known for body traffic —sites where illegitimate, opposite sex interactions of the *na-mahram*³³⁶ sort took place, such as city intersections,

³³² The 1982 Islamic Penal Code was originally ratified by the *Majles*'s (Parliament) Legal and Judicial Council and then passed by the Guardian Council for a period of five years. It was revised and re-approved by the Islamic Consultancy Parliament on July 30, 1991 and ratified by the High Expediency Council on November 28, 1991. For the English translation of the text, see MEHR website, accessed January 11, 2012, http://mehr.org/Islamic_Penal_Code_of_Iran.pdf.

³³³ Entessar, "Criminal Law and the Legal System in Revolutionary Iran," p. 100.

³³⁴ Paidar, p. 187.

³³⁵ *Ettela'at*, Enqelab Edition, 10 Bahman 1357/ January 30, 1979, accessed November 9, 2011, <http://i47.tinypic.com/14jxncl.jpg>.

³³⁶ The distinction between *mahram* and *na-mahram* has been explained as distinctions in kin relationships that determine one's relationship (and thus marriageability) to the opposite sex. In *shar'ia* terminology, *mahram* are kin who are unmarriageable, such as females with permanent blood relations to their fathers,

cinemas, brothels, and commercial centers— would be re-inserted into a conceptual landscape in which the revolutionary state designates all coordinates of moral and ethical interactions.

In the historic period when *Shahr-e No* is destroyed and prostitution becomes illegal, seismic, discursive shifts in prostitution discourse take place. The role of the prostitute is re-conceptualized along with the function and purpose of prostitution, leading to the dispersion and mutation of the sex trade. It is during the stage in which the citadel red light district is destroyed that prostitution discourse enters the realm of Islamic ideology of marriage —though re-imagined and imposed onto a cityscape that was to *become* identified as Islamic.³³⁷ During this moment, the “ghettoization” of women’s sexual labor (in which their bodies provide sexual gratification for men) is teased into the framework of Shi’a legal discourse and articulated as public policy. To address social dilemmas —such as delayed marriage, prolonged bachelorhood, and rising unemployment— Iranian authorities encouraged a “temporary” solution —marriage.

Sigheh —the Persian colloquial term for a fixed-term temporary marriage in Shi’a Islam— is posited, in official discussions of the economy and post-war rehabilitation, as a provisional and exigent method to regulate sexuality and maintain social order.³³⁸ In

grandfathers, brothers, sons, grandsons, uncles and nephews. One can become *mahram* to the opposite sex through marriage; thus in-laws, such as the father, son, stepfather and stepson, will be considered *mahram*. *Na-mahram* then refers to all others who can potentially marry one another; “therefore, veiling regulations should be sustained.” Quoted from footnote in Fataneh Farahani, *Diasporic Narratives of Sexuality: Identity Formation among Iranian-Swedish Women* (Stockholm: Stockholm Universitet, 2007), p. 166. I again address *mahram/na-mahram* paradigm in relation to space in Chapter Four.

³³⁷On the subject of the Islamization of Tehran’s public sphere as an Islamic space filled with Islamic objects, in the post-revolutionary period, see Varzi, *Warring Souls*, p. 108.

³³⁸ The official legal terminology for *sigheh* in Arabic is *nikah al-mut’a*, which has been literally translated as a pleasure or enjoyment marriage. See Shahla Haeri, “Temporary Marriage and the State in Iran: An Islamic Discourse on Female Sexuality,” *Social Research* 59, no. 1, Religion and Politics (Spring, 1992): pp. 201-223.

Twelver Shi'ite ideology, there are two main forms of marriage: permanent (legally known as *nikah mut'a*) and temporary (known as *mut'a sigheh*). In either marital union, men pay money or valuables to gain exclusive right and access to sexual relations with women.³³⁹ (In the words of Shi'a *mujtahid* Muhaqqiq Hilli, marriage is "a contract whose object is that of dominion over the vagina, without the right of possession.")³⁴⁰ According to Shi'a legal consensus, *sigheh* is one kind of marital agreement (*'aqd*), legitimized via a fixed-term contract between a Muslim man and an unmarried woman, "be she a virgin, divorced, or widowed," writes Haeri.³⁴¹ It is meant for sexual pleasure, unlike a permanent marriage whose objective is mainly procreation.³⁴² Both parties in a *mut'a* arrangement decide the time limitations of their union, as well as the amount of money to be given to the temporary wife.³⁴³

In general, an Islamic marriage is perceived as a contract of exchange based on duties and rights, wherein sexual access and compensation factor into the husband-wife relationship.³⁴⁴ One of several key distinctions between temporary and permanent marital contracts is that a Muslim man has the right to maintain multiple *sigheh* partnerships at any time, whereas a Muslim woman can have only one male *sigheh*

³³⁹ Haeri, *Law of Desire*, p. 17.

³⁴⁰ Jurist al-Hilli was a thirteenth-century *mujtahid* (Shi'a legal scholar and jurist) whose works were fundamental in shaping Twelver Shi'a legal doctrines. Mir-Hosseini, "Sexuality, Rights, and Islam: Competing Gender Discourses in Postrevolutionary Iran," p. 207.

³⁴¹ Haeri, *Law of Desire*, p. 2, 54-55.

³⁴² *Ibid.*, p. 1.

³⁴³ *Ibid.*

³⁴⁴ See Ziba Mir-Hosseini, "Sexuality, Rights, and Islam: Competing Gender Discourses in Postrevolutionary Iran," in *Women in Iran from 1800 to the Islamic Republic*, ed. Lois Beck and Guity Nashat (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 2004), p. 207.

relationship at a time.³⁴⁵ Likewise, this arrangement is not a permanent marriage, whereby a man is limited to four permanent wives (although he can also have *sigheh* partners, simultaneously).

Haeri reported that after the fall of the Pahlavi regime, many of *Shahr-e No*'s prostitutes (who were not executed or imprisoned) entered rehabilitation programs wherein some of them were transformed into *sigheh* wives.³⁴⁶ This program was presented as a kind of rebirth for "fallen women" to reform them into pious, useful members of society.³⁴⁷ Several years later, in order to combat the problems of unmarried veterans, economic duress, and unrestrained male sexuality, Iranian officials began suggesting temporary marriage, contending that it, as sexual safety valve that Islam offers believers, would ensure social order and tame sexual anxiety among men and women who could not enter permanent marriages for economic reasons. And, more recently, in 2002, the government reportedly proposed establishing "chastity houses," where men and women seeking to enter a *sigheh* partnership could meet and engage in religiously-sanctioned, brief sexual encounters. Despite these three instances, which illustrate the links between *sigheh* and prostitution, the government and clerical authorities deny any associations between the two.

³⁴⁵ In a temporary union, a woman can only have one temporary marriage at any one time, whereas a Muslim man is allowed as many *sigheh* wives as he desires, in addition to the four permanent wives he is legally permitted to marry. The possibility of a limitless number of female *sigheh* is just one area of ambiguity in which women's rights activists demand justice and review. Other questions concern the disenfranchisement of women and the status of wife, especially when a legal system allows a prostitute to bear the same title and status as that of a temporary wife who bears legitimate children with her *sigheh* partner.

³⁴⁶ Floor, *A Social History of Sexual Relations in Iran*, p. 277.

³⁴⁷ Haeri, *Law of Desire*, p. 100.

Religious officials' treatment of sex work is ambivalent and manifold. On one hand, they legitimize it via the legal artifice of temporary marriage sanctioned by Islam. On the other hand, they are reticent to acknowledge —some even pointedly denying— the existence of this legal practice.

In this chapter, I contend that these three episodes mark when the Islamic Republic began to expand *sigheh* in its Islamic framework to include prostitution. The introduction of *sigheh* as a legitimate method of rehabilitation points to a fundamental shift in the treatment, regard, and employment of prostitutes after the 1979 revolution. Initially the “prostitute” is condemned and encouraged to reform —in part, to help “fallen women” return to a morally guided path. In the aftermath of the Revolution, *sigheh* is promoted as an Islamically sanctioned solution to rehabilitate prostitutes who enter into temporary marriages with war veterans.

Yet as economic problems increase over time along with the rising presence of prostitutes in urban spaces, government officials begin to comment publically about encouraging *sigheh* partnerships among the certain demographics, namely the youth. However, they promote *sigheh* as a response to controlling human sexuality, reasoning that young men and women would suffer sexual and psychological problems without a responsible framework and avenue for release. According to media reports, a government agency had drawn plans for setting up government-regulated brothels in which *sigheh* would be used to sanction sexual relationships between the sexes. Indeed, the participation of women and men in these programs was fundamental to this strategy, as were the historical shifts in the promotion and application of *sigheh* to solve domestic problems beyond regulating sexuality. There are at least two remarkable —and

unforeseen— consequences of these policies: the first, that the government acknowledges the problem of prostitution and offers the temporary solution of *sigheh*, and the second, that the social category and identity of “the prostitute” is re-constructed and expands to such an extent that permanent wives and in particular, women who are educated and from the middle class, conceivably fall into this category.

In order to analyze the discourse of prostitution as it has manifested after 1979, I briefly return to the site of *Shahr-e No* and discuss the reform programs meant to absolve the sins of female prostitutes through penance rituals. Then, I discuss the Islamic Republic of Iran’s regulatory efforts to clamp down on the sex industry as socioeconomic problems surmount, requiring government response. The remaining sections cover separate instances when *sigheh* discourse is integrated into discussions of human sexuality and economic crisis. Because there are, to my knowledge, very few academic works in both Persian and English that seriously tackle the contentious subject of the links between temporary marriage and prostitution, I have assembled individual sources—including social science and medical journals, newspapers, blogs, government and NGO reports, and scholarly works— on three vectors: *sigheh* according to Shi’a legal tradition, street prostitution, and *sigheh* in practice. I analyze the point at which these vectors meet, highlighting studies that document its rising usage, acceptance, and visibility.

Theorizing the Prostitute as “Other”

Prostitution is an extremely controversial subject, stirring many debates about appropriate government response and whether or not to condemn or rehabilitate

prostitutes.³⁴⁸ Disputably the world's "oldest profession," it has, at different historic moments, clashed and adapted in accordance to social norms.³⁴⁹ For prostitutes and others involved in the sex work industry, the literature on their vilification, regulation, and exploitation is quite extensive, engaging with issues of patriarchal power, sexual exploitation and agency, economic survival, religious persecution and reform, and social deviance —among many others. Within this discourse is a process of othering that often demarcates normative from abnormal human behavior and is affected by many contradictory assumptions about human sexuality.³⁵⁰ Likewise, the figure of the prostitute as "other" continues to influence both government policy and public opinion in Iran. Erving Goffman contends "society establishes the means of categorizing persons and the complement of attributes felt to be ordinary and natural for members of each of these categories."³⁵¹ Those individuals that cannot conform to socially constructed norms are judged as deviant and stigmatized. As Goffman argues, the term deviant refers to people who are seen "as declining voluntarily and openly to accept the social place accorded them, and who act irregularly and somewhat rebelliously in connection with our basic institutions."³⁵² Goffman defines the term stigma as "an attribute that is deeply discrediting." Three types of attributes differentiate stigmas: physical deformities, a

³⁴⁸ Belinda J. Carpenter, *Re-thinking Prostitution: Feminism, Sex, and the Self* (New York: Peter Lang Publishing, New York), p. 28.

³⁴⁹ Tami Moore, "The Bartering of Female Sexuality," in *Global Perspectives on Prostitution and Sex Trafficking*, ed. Rochelle Dalla, et. al. (London: Lexington Books, 2011), p. 281.

³⁵⁰ Shannon Bell, *Reading, Writing, and Rewriting the Prostitute Body* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994), p. 2.

³⁵¹ Erving Goffman, *Stigma* (New York: Simon & Shuster, 1991), p. 2.

³⁵² *Ibid.*, p. 143.

problematic character, and a tribal or racial affiliation.³⁵³ Prostitutes are included in the second category, along with drug addicts, gypsies and the urban unrepresented poor, to name a few.³⁵⁴

Shannon Bell argues that the characterization of “the prostitute” as “other” is a discursive outcome of a modernist discourse that dichotomized women into “good” and “bad” characters.³⁵⁵ In *Reading, Writing and Rewriting the Prostitute Body*, Bell suggests that “modernity through a process of othering has produced ‘the prostitute’ as the other of the other within the categorical other, ‘woman.’”³⁵⁶ She argues that the hierarchal, binary opposition of masculine and feminine, which is “at the heart of the foundational metaphysics of Western thought,” is reproduced within this dichotomy of good and bad woman and reproduced in feminist and modernist writings. She elaborates, “Prostitutes were analyzed and categorized in relation to the bourgeois female ideas: the good wife and the virginal daughter. The prostitute might be the same, she might be different; often she was located on a continuum somewhere between sameness and difference, but she was always the disprivileged other in relation to the determinant site: wife, mother, daughter.”³⁵⁷ Bell contends that the process of othering runs through both feminist and modern constructions of the prostitute body, which was “actively produced as a

³⁵³ Ibid., p. 3.

³⁵⁴ Ibid., p. 23.

³⁵⁵ Bell, *Reading, Writing, and Rewriting the Prostitute Body*, pp. 1-2.

³⁵⁶ Ibid., p. 2.

³⁵⁷ Ibid., p. 40.

marginalized social-sexual identity, particularly during the latter half of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth century.”³⁵⁸

Although both Goffman and Bell discuss the varied constructions of stigmatization from different cultural and literary contexts,³⁵⁹ their individual discussions of the construction of the prostitute as “other” are useful in this analysis of how certain state policies towards prostitutes were grounded in the demonization and stigmatization of female prostitutes during the Pahlavi era and maintained in the Islamic Republic. The conceptual portrait of the “prostitute” as whore, sexual object, insult, and paladin of decadence and moral corruption is prevalent in both pre and post-revolutionary political discourse in Iran.³⁶⁰ In the Iranian context, the female prostitute as other featured prominently in modernist literary discourse, especially in the writings of nationalists, religious scholars, and modernist women’s advocates during the late 19th century until the early 1970s, when Iran underwent state modernization and economic development.³⁶¹ The prostitute was the antithesis to the idyllic Muslim, Iranian woman character, which *Shi’a* clerics supported as an “ideal type model for Iran women.”³⁶² For Iranian nationalists and women’s advocates, prostitutes featured in national discussions in the

³⁵⁸ Ibid.

³⁵⁹ Bell offers a deconstructive readings of key texts—such as classical Greek texts, 19th century medical and reforming works, contemporary feminist and performance texts—to produce a “genealogy of the prostitute body.” See Bell, pp. 1, 137.

³⁶⁰ Paidar writes, “The Pahlavi dynasty was labeled as the ‘spreader of prostitution’ and the ‘corrupter of women and family.’” Paidar, p. 217.

³⁶¹ See Floor, *A Social History of Sexual Relations in Iran*, 2008; Paidar (1997); Afsaneh Najmabadi, *Women with Mustaches and Men without Beards: Gender and Sexual Anxieties of Iranian Modernity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005); Firoozeh Kashani-Sabet, *Conceiving Citizens Women and the Politics of Motherhood in Iran* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011).

³⁶² Shireen Mahdavi, “Women and the Shii Ulama in Iran Author,” *Middle Eastern Studies* 19, no. 1 (Jan. 1983): p. 18.

first half of the twentieth century about women's citizenship and motherhood; these themes typically incorporated the topics of hygiene, reproductive politics, and sexuality.³⁶³ Prostitutes were specifically accused of spreading sexually transmitted diseases, destroying the marital home, and spoiling new generations (as it was believed that infected men could spread syphilis to their wives and children).³⁶⁴

In the 1960s, a treatise on female criminality identified a female-specific category of traits considered injurious and unbecoming of the ideal, Muslim woman. In this work, prostitutes are viewed with particular disdain. The 1962 publication of Qadisih Hijazi, author of *Barrasi-ye Jara'im-e Zan dar Iran* (An Investigation of Women's Criminal Activity in Iran) was the first "book-length Iranian treatise on female criminality."³⁶⁵ A devout Muslim raised in a clerical family, she argued that "criminal-women" failed at being mothers, unlike "mother-women" who excelled in child-rearing and maintaining pious, crime-free domestic lives. Prostitutes did not have any socially acceptable place or role.³⁶⁶ Historian Cyrus Schayegh has described Hijazi's conceptualization of female criminality as founded upon a woman's rejection of her responsibility to her assumed social role:

A woman's original crime is a sin against her body, a body that does not truly belong to her, a body she has to look after for society's sake.

³⁶³ See Firoozeh Kashani-Sabet, *Conceiving Citizens Women and the Politics of Motherhood in Iran* (2011).

³⁶⁴ Firoozeh Kashani-Sabet, "The Politics of Reproduction: Maternalism and Women's Hygiene in Iran, 1896-1941," *International Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 38, no. 1 (Feb. 2006): p. 14. See also Kashani-Sabet (2011).

³⁶⁵ Cyrus Schayegh, "Criminal-women and Mother-women: Sociocultural Transformations and the Critique of Criminality in Early Post-World War II Iran," *Journal of Middle East Women's Studies* 2, no. 3 (Fall 2006): p. 1.

³⁶⁶ Schayegh, "Criminal-women and Mother-women: Sociocultural Transformations and the Critique of Criminality in Early Post-World War II Iran," p. 2.

Prostitution is morally condemnable, medically dangerous, and socially harmful. A woman's attempt to subvert her body's basic purpose—reproduction—drives her insane and endangers society.³⁶⁷

Here, the prostitute's crime is her rejection of reproduction. According to Hijazi, prostitutes consider reproduction as a method of attaining sexual pleasure of men and not for the purposes of maintaining social order or the propagation of the humans. In this framework of female criminality, the prostitute is the female *persona non grata* or the anti-role model that strays from her social and biological duties.

The theme of straying from a righteous path is a consistent trope in the discourse of prostitution leading up to the Revolution. Scorn was directed particularly at wealthy and middle class women who were condemned for having lost their moral standing during the Pahlavi era.³⁶⁸ During mass demonstrations, popular slogans denounced the treatment of women as “sex-objects.”³⁶⁹ The Pahlavi dynasty was labeled as the “spreader of prostitution.”³⁷⁰ Throughout the revolutionary period (1978-1982), the female prostitute continued to garner mixed public sympathy. Prostitutes maintained a precarious social position —either they were pitied as victims of social ills, or they were treated as leading a “pathological” life in need of a cure, writes Shahidian.³⁷¹ Prostitutes were also judged to be women who were already promiscuous, unethical, and impious — characteristics that conflict with the ideological construct of the Muslim mother and

³⁶⁷ Ibid., p. 12.

³⁶⁸ Paidar explains, “While lower-class women were portrayed as passive victims of the regime's oppression, affluent women were condemned as sex-objects, accomplices of the Shah and oppressors of lower-class women.” See Paidar, p. 171.

³⁶⁹ Paidar, p. 217.

³⁷⁰ Ibid.

³⁷¹ Hammed Shahidian, *Women in Iran: Gender Politics in the Islamic Republic*, Volume 2 (Westport: Greenwood Press, 2002), p. 186.

family, foundational features of the Islamic Republic's constitution.³⁷² Even the word "prostitute" became a slur. When a woman was called a "prostitute," it connected her to all that was anathema to the Islamic Republic's model female citizens—women of piety, character, and family values espousing revolutionary ideals.³⁷³ In 1980, Ayatollah Khomeini condemned the Pahlavis by associating their government with sexual pandering: "In the name of freedom, progress, and civilization, Reza Khan and Mohammad Reza Khan led all our youths to prostitution but took all their freedoms away."³⁷⁴ By all accounts, post-revolutionary Iran regards prostitution—including the

³⁷² For instance, in the section "Women in the Constitution" of the Islamic Republic's national constitution, it affirms: "The family is the fundamental unit of society and the main center for the growth and edification of human being... It is the duty of the Islamic government to provide the necessary facilities for the attainment of this goal. This view of the family unit delivers woman from being regarded as an object or instrument in the service of promoting consumerism and exploitation. Not only does woman recover thereby her momentous and precious function of motherhood, rearing of ideologically committed human beings, she also assumes a pioneering social role and becomes the fellow struggler of man in all vital areas of life. Given the weighty responsibilities that woman thus assumes, she is accorded in Islam great value and nobility." See *Islamic Republic of Iran Constitution*, Preamble.

³⁷³ The integration of the "prostitute" and the "whore" are still part of the political discourse in Iran; in particular the term "whore" has become a facile insult directed at women who are accused of participation in projects or displaying attitudes considered unacceptable and immoral by the regime. As recent as January 2012, Iran's Council of Public Culture announced its decision to disband the established Cinema House—a non-governmental film-maker's guild in Iran. Conservative director Farajollah Salahshour (director of film *The Prophet Joseph*) had denounced the association as a whorehouse. Soon after, news reports and the blogosphere were charged with debate over the exposure of nubile actress Golfshifteh Farahani, who posed semi-topless (her hands strategically covering her nipples) in a French film magazine *Madame Le Figaro*. The reaction from Iranian authorities was neither pleasant nor tongue-in-cheek. Iranian authorities informed her, had she decided to return to Iran from her current residence in Paris, she would not be welcomed to her home country. For Salahshour quote, see "Salahshour: Cinema-ye Iran Fahesheh-khaneh Ast/ Salahshour: Iran's House of Cinema is a Whorehouse," *Aftab News*, 23 Mehr 23 1390/ October 15, 2011, accessed February 14, 2014, <http://aftabnews.ir/vdcepp8zwjh8xoi.b9bj.html>. See also "Vezarat-e Ershad Khaneh-ye Cinema ra Monhal Kard/ Ministry of Culture Dissolves House of Cinema," BBC Persian, January 3, 2012, accessed February 13, 2012, http://www.bbc.co.uk/persian/iran/2012/01/120103_i06_khaneyecinema_shut_down.shtml.

See also "Chare-ee joz Enhelal-e Khane-ye Cinema Nadashtim/ We Had No Choice But to Disband the House of Cinema," Fars News Agency, 21 Azar 1390 /December 12, 2011, accessed February 13, 2012, <http://farsnews.com/newstext.php?nn=13901121000539>.

³⁷⁴ Guity Nashat, "Women in the Islamic Republic of Iran," *Iranian Studies* 13, no. 1/4, Iranian Revolution in Perspective (1980): pp. 165-194. Quoted in Khomeini, *Jomhuri Eslami*, 16 Ordibehesht 1359/6 May 1980.

women involved— not just as a criminal act, but also a morally vacant and socially deviant, Westernized lifestyle and condition.³⁷⁵

Criminalization and Reform: Prostitution after 1979

By 1982, strict punishments were identified in Iran's criminal code to warn potential offenders of their fates in the event they were caught, prosecuted, and punished for abetting illicit sex.³⁷⁶ In the penal code itself, the crime and punishment of prostitution are cited in the section *ghavadi* (pimping).³⁷⁷ Prostitution is considered a crime against public morality and chastity—a capital offense.³⁷⁸ Any person who facilitates prostitution or encourages immoral acts, establishes or manages brothels, or facilitates travel abroad for the purposes of prostitution is subject to particular punishments, including lashing and in certain cases, stoning.³⁷⁹ In Islamic jurisprudence, illicit sex falls

³⁷⁵ Shahidian, p. 186

³⁷⁶ The penal code is based on a system of four different types of crimes, which are subject to four different types of punishments. They are *hodoud*, *qesas*, *ta'zir*, and *diyat*. *Hodoud* (singular, *hadd*) are acts prohibited by God, with mandatory penalties defined by the *Qur'an*. *Qesas* are crimes against a victim and his or her family; the decision of retribution lies with the victim's family in cases of murder. *Ta'zir* crimes are acts for which no specific penalties are mentioned in the *Qur'an*, leaving it up to the judge's discretion. *Diyat* punishment refers to a form of payment or compensation, payable to the victim or his or family. Mehran Tamadonfar, "Islam, Law, and Political Control in Contemporary Iran," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 40, no. 2 (June, 2001): p. 213.

³⁷⁷ Islamic Republic of Iran Penal Code, Book 2, *Hadd* punishment, Part 4, Articles 135-138. The colloquial term for pimping is *jakeshi kardan*; a pimp is a *jakesh*. Both terms are considered derogatory and thus not used in polite speech.

³⁷⁸ According to Amnesty International, "Under Iranian law, capital offenses include adultery by married people, incest, rape, four convictions of an unmarried person for fornication, three convictions for drinking alcohol, or four convictions for homosexual acts among men." Prostitution is included in facilitating the fornication between unmarried persons. See "Iran: The Last Executioner of Children," Amnesty International, June 27, 2007, accessed February 13, 2012, http://www.amnesty.org.uk/news_details.asp?NewsID=17401.

³⁷⁹ Stoning punishments are administered for primarily adultery cases, and Article 172 and 198 of the constitution grant judges the authority to accept stoning as a possible sentence. See Shadi Sadr, "The 'End Of Stoning': Islamic Republic Style," Huffington Post: The Blog, March 13, 2012, accessed July 12, 2012, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/shadi-sadr/iran-stoning_b_1335809.html.

under the umbrella category *zina* and includes the acts of adultery, prostitution, pre-marital fornication, and homosexuality. Sex between an unmarried man and woman is explicitly forbidden and is punishable by prison, lashing, or execution by stoning. The penal code designates criminal sexual activity as *hodoud* (literally in Arabic, restrictions) crimes —meaning that specified forms of punishment are outlined in the *Qur'an* and *hadith* and thus should be applied.³⁸⁰ However it is important to note that certain conditions must be met for the application of this punishment. These include the use of ‘proper procedures, such as fair and reliable witnesses, and the determination of the “circumstances” of the case.’³⁸¹

Simultaneous to the formulation and implementation of an Islamic jurisprudence-based criminal code, which handles prostitution-related offenses, lawmakers and clerical authorities began pursuing the route of rehabilitation to control prostitution. For those prostitutes from the red-light district not imprisoned, many were reportedly given a second chance, provided they accept a specific kind of Islamic reform. Yet before delving into the details of this program, it is necessary to first return to the gripping days of the revolutionary period, when *Shahr-e No* was demolished.

Little is published in Persian and English on the individual fates of *Shahr-e No*’s prostitutes. In Iran, the available sources are located primarily in public discourse—for instance, during tangential conversations about the site’s historic past. In one exceptional

³⁸⁰ Mehran Tamadonfar, “Islam, Law, and Political Control in Contemporary Iran,” *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 40, no. 2 (June, 2001): p. 213.

³⁸¹ Tamadonfar, “Islam, Law, and Political Control in Contemporary Iran,” p. 212. For instance, in the case of adultery (which is a capital offense and penalized as a *hodoud* crime), four credible witnesses must testify that they observed a man and woman naked under the sheets or saw them engaging in the act of intercourse. See *Islamic Republic of Iran Criminal Code*, Articles 76, 77, 78, and 79.

case, the topic of *Shahr-e No* became the point of departure for a university thesis on street prostitution in contemporary Tehran. Doctoral candidate, Akbar Varvayyi, at the University of Tehran in the School of Law and Political Science, composed the 2008 thesis, “*Barrasi-ye Avamel-e Ruspigari-ye Kheyebani dar Tehran-e Bozorg*” (Investigation of the Beginning of Street Prostitution in Greater Tehran).³⁸² This dissertation provides key information about former *Shahr-e No* residents —the prostitutes’ main sources of income and housing for instance. Varvayyi recounts that after prostitutes became homeless, they began pouring into neighboring areas. *Mahal-e Jamshid* (Jamshid district) and *Meydan-e Shush* (Shush Square) for instance, became provisional residences.³⁸³ Many of the prostitutes found work in parks or on roadsides; most were runaways or had a history of drug usage. After an undisclosed number of years, authorities grew weary of the tarnishing of the area’s reputation. There were reports of makeshift brothels and other illegal activities. Arrests soon followed, and those suspected of criminal activity, including approximately eight hundred women believed to be working as prostitutes, were detained. (According to Varvayyi, their fates were mixed: some faced imprisonment; others became vocal supporters and activists for the

³⁸² His research also discusses the hygiene practices of prostitutes and their average weekly salaries. This dissertation contributes pivotal historical details about *Shahr-e No*’s former inhabitants, especially during a time when the research topic would have been deemed taboo. However, being that the thesis project was approved and conducted during the reformist administration of President Mohammed Khatami, it is probable that university professors were more at liberty to approve controversial doctoral dissertations in the social sciences. See Akbar Varvayyi, “*Barrasi-ye Avamel-e Ruspigari-ye Kheyebani dar Tehran-e Bozorg/The Investigation of the Causes of Street Prostitution in Greater Tehran*, Ph.D. diss., University of Tehran, School of Law and Political Science, 2008.

³⁸³ The most destitute of the prostitutes were the *god-neshin*, a terminology for a prostitute residing in the poorest and dirtiest areas of Tehran, such as Shush Square in south Tehran. In this area, prostitutes were known to wear *chadors* and were managed by a *riess* (boss), whom they called “*Maman*.” See Varvayyi, pp. 44-48.

government. And some women entered low-wage earning jobs, working as domestic help or seamstresses.)³⁸⁴

Other academic sources, albeit less detailed, offer general information about the resurgence of the sex industry after the Revolution. Anthropologist Shahla Haeri and historian Paidar —both scholars who published in English— mention the incipient government policy towards prostitutes immediately after *Shahr-e No* was razed. With prostitutes no longer concentrated in red-light districts, there were growing concerns that the sex industry would penetrate city life —and this time, under the radar. For those madams and prostitutes of *Qal'eh Shah-re No* not condemned to death, many were given the option of reform. Paidar explains,

[The Islamic Republic's] Bureau [for Combating Corruption] adopted a carrot and stick policy towards prostitution. It announced that prostitutes who chose to repent would be assisted to marry and 'return to the warm embrace of family life,' or be provided with jobs in specially set-up workshops. Those who chose to 'continue their wicked ways, causing perversion of the country's youth and betraying the blood of the martyrs of the Revolution, would be punished by revolutionary courts.'³⁸⁵

The Bureau For Combating Corruption was set up to cleanse post-revolutionary Iranian society of the “manifestations of 'Westernized' gender relations;” it also sought to stop the “free relationships between men and women.”³⁸⁶ According to Haeri, the Bureau's special rehabilitation workshops focused on training former prostitutes to embrace their maternal and spousal responsibilities³⁸⁷ —for their reform necessitated accepting

³⁸⁴ Ibid.

³⁸⁵ *Kayhan*, Issue 82. Quoted in Paidar, p. 346.

³⁸⁶ Nahid Yeganeh, “Women, Nationalism, and Islam in Contemporary Political Discourse in Iran,” *Feminist Review* 44, Nationalism and National Identities (Summer, 1993): p. 16.

³⁸⁷ Haeri, *Law of Desire*, p. 100.

gendered roles of mother, wife, and sister which the Islamic Republic's religious authorities encouraged.³⁸⁸ With room and board provided, former prostitutes were educated in household tasks, such as ironing and washing. They were also pushed to re-establish family bonds, gain employment, and marry.³⁸⁹ The main idea behind this program was to reform prostitutes through their resettlement into the most honorable setting: the domestic sphere. In this site, a woman's obligations to her family would ensure the safe maintenance of a pious household. Moreover, women would learn to embrace "instinctual" maternal sensibilities, such as childrearing. By accepting Islam as a guiding force, former prostitutes would be rehabilitated and reintegrated into the *ummat* (Muslim community) —from which they were presumably occluded during their work as prostitutes. The program's emphasis on reforming prostitutes generated much public sympathy; subsequently donations poured into this revolutionary program.³⁹⁰

Re-Introducing Revolutionary Sigheh

Also available to prostitutes was an alternative program —touted as an "ultimate rehabilitation."³⁹¹ The slogan was "productive labor makes free," describes Floor.³⁹² According to Haeri, the government needed to find a quick solution to minimize the rising numbers of single veterans unable to find wives and/or sexual partners. As a

³⁸⁸See Guity Nashat, "Women in the Islamic Republic of Iran," *Iranian Studies* 13, no. ¼, Iranian Revolution in Perspective (1980): pp. 165-194.

³⁸⁹ Shahidian, *Women in Iran: Gender Politics in the Islamic Republic*, vol. 2, p. 186.

³⁹⁰ Haeri, *Law of Desire*, p. 100.

³⁹¹ Ibid.

³⁹² Floor, p. 265.

method of providing a sexual respite for veterans of the Iran-Iraq war, they began encouraging temporary marriage among the former prostitutes. In what Haeri has described as “penance *sigheh*,” prostitutes were brought to northern Tehran mansions for “rehabilitation and purification.”³⁹³ While in rehabilitation centers, they were encouraged to marry revolutionary guards, temporarily—which many did so willingly and unwillingly.³⁹⁴ Women were also told that veterans of the war would be granted a place in heaven—suggesting that marriage to a veteran would mean a shared spot.³⁹⁵ (Another report noted that “[s]exual *sigheh* was also applied as a means of both repentance and punishment. In prisons too, women prisoners who were virgins were forced into *sigheh* with their jailors before being executed, since according to [the State’s] religious beliefs they [the prisoners] would otherwise go to heaven.”)³⁹⁶

Ayatollah Khomeini praised especially women who demonstrated this kind of sacrifice in the name of revolutionary causes supporting the Islamic Republic.³⁹⁷ In a mother’s day speech addressing women, he acknowledged “that brave young girl whose magnanimous spirit overflowed with sincerity and genuineness [who] said: ‘Since I

³⁹³ Ibid. Similar rehabilitation programs were reported for “harmed women” in recent years. According to Shahidian, in 2000, newspaper *Iran* reported that 350 prostitutes were taken to similar centers, and the number of prostitutes was higher than the previous year. See Shahidian, p. 186.

³⁹⁴ Paidar, p. 278.

³⁹⁵ Ibid., p. 279. For a detailed explanation, see Haeri, *Law of Desire*, pp. 99-100.

³⁹⁶ Ibid., p. 278. Quoted in Amnesty International Report, 1987. The details of this situation are not explicated in this report. Haeri also does not provide further details about this situation.

³⁹⁷ That women should assume operational roles during Iran’s war effort is a theme Ayatollah Khomeini identifies as an example of female sacrifice in the name of a revolutionary cause. Women volunteers were crucial to Khomeini’s directive for a national mobilization army of twenty million; thus women received participated in a range of activities servicing the war effort, some of whom received non-combat military and first-aid training. See Afsaneh Najmabadi, “Power, Morality, and the New Muslim Womanhood,” in *The Politics of Social Transformation in Afghanistan, Iran, and Pakistan*, ed. Myron Weiner and Ali Banuazizi, pp. 382-383 (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1994).

cannot go to the war front, let me pay my debt to the revolution and my religion through this marriage.”³⁹⁸ Although he did not distinguish this marriage as a *sigheh* union in this particular case, he still highlighted a woman’s responsibility in galvanizing the war effort. This is exemplified by her marrying a would-be martyr —or, in other words, veterans of war, who were praised as the revolution’s ultimate paragons of self-sacrifice.³⁹⁹ In the same vein, reformed women who married veterans could “[reintroduce *sigheh*] into society from a completely new perspective, ‘purifying’ the institution of some of its negative cultural connotations.”⁴⁰⁰ Ayatollah Khomeini was not alone in his approbation of *sigheh*; the same sentiment was echoed by other esteemed figures of the revolution, including Ayatollah Motahhari, who found it to be one of the most progressive and farsighted aspects of Islamic thought.”⁴⁰¹

Publicizing *Sigheh* in Post-revolutionary Iran

After *sigheh* was integrated into government-administered rehabilitation programs, there were three different occasions when officials publicize their support of temporary marriage. In lieu of focusing on *sigheh*’s curbing of errant, human sexual practices, government officials emphasized finding an Islamic solution to socioeconomic problems. In one particular case, temporary marriage is assigned a regulatory purpose. As

³⁹⁸ Excerpt is from Khomeini’s speech, delivered to a group of women in honor of Women’s Day. See “Ruhollah al-Musawi al-Khomeini Women’s Day Speech,” Iran Chamber Society, 25 Farvardin 1361/April 14, 1982, accessed January 21, 2012, http://www.iranchamber.com/history/rkhomeini/books/women_position_khomeini.pdf.

³⁹⁹ See Roxanne Varzi, “Iran’s Pieta: Motherhood, Sacrifice and Film in the Aftermath of the Iran-Iraq War,” *Feminist Review* 88, War (2008): pp. 86-98.

⁴⁰⁰ Haeri, *Law of Desire*, p. 210.

⁴⁰¹ Haeri, “Power of Ambiguity: Cultural Improvisations on the Theme of Temporary Marriage,” p. 144.

a method of reigning in street prostitution, the government had intended to establish special centers where men and women met for brief, sexual unions under official watch. These three episodes, which I present chronologically, exemplify how the state comes to integrate temporary marriage in both discussions of uncontrollable, human sexual desires—of veterans, self-sacrificing women, the unemployed, the unmarried, and the youth—and socioeconomic duress. Yet, interestingly, government officials continue to deny *sigheh*'s relevance to prostitution.

By the late 1980s, Iran was entrenched in a post-war trauma. The country's casualty-heavy eight-year war with Iraq culminated in high numbers of veterans and widows in need of social and public assistance. Yet by 1985, journalists were already reported about an impending marriage crisis, brought about by economic problems, housing shortages, and decreased incomes.⁴⁰² Iranian president Hojatolislam Ali Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani began offering a temporary solution—*sigheh* (temporary marriage). In a series of speeches, television appearances, and newspaper interviews in 1983, 1985, and 1997, he addressed a subject seldom discussed in public forums.⁴⁰³ Rafsanjani expressed concern about the societal consequences of fewer marriages; for him, they would present society with untamed sexual problems and sexual instincts. (According to Paidar, there was also a concern that these problems might contribute to “an increase in

⁴⁰² This crisis was also blamed on the alleged increase in the age of marriage, which had gone from 18.4 in 1966 to 19.7 in 1986, according to a 1988 report by the SCI. See Paidar, pp. 284-285.

⁴⁰³ See *Ebtakar News*, “Mokhalefan-e Ezdevaj-e Movaqat Cheh Migouyand?/ What Do the Opponents of Temporary Marriage Say?,” Issue 949 (12 Tir 1386/ July 3, 2007); “‘Tarvij-e Ezdevaj-e Movaqat’ va Mavane’e-e Shar’ei va Orfi/ Promoting Temporary Marriage’ and Religious and Common Obstacles,” BBC Persian, 15 Khordad 1396/ June 5, 2007, accessed September 11, 2011. http://www.bbc.co.uk/persian/iran/story/2007/06/070605_ka-short-marriage.shtml.

venereal diseases, especially since prostitution had gone underground.”)⁴⁰⁴ For Rafsanjani, *sigheh* was Islam’s “safety valve to prevent explosion.”⁴⁰⁵ He cautioned, “It is not there for men to satisfy their voluptuousness and ruin their families.”⁴⁰⁶

In a pivotal 1985 interview with *Zan-e Rouz* magazine, he again iterated *sigheh*’s ideal purpose.⁴⁰⁷ During an interview with the CBS program *60 Minutes*, which aired in 1997 for an American audience, he clarified his views on temporary marriage. Though no longer Iran’s head-of-state, Rafsanjani has maintained his political dominance in Iran’s deliberative bodies of the Expediency Council and Assembly of Experts. In answer to journalist Mike Wallace, who asked him about how *sigheh* functions in Iranian society, Rafsanjani argued,

This corruption in ethics, which is so common in the West, in Islam has been organized in a controlled manner and a legal way. It has been considered that under certain circumstances, when a man and woman aren’t able to marry on a permanent basis, they need to satisfy their instincts. We believe this is a solution to sexual problems... They need to satisfy their instincts. It is not possible for everyone to have a permanent marriage —[for instance] occasionally some are travelers, some do not have the financial potential. There are many things. There are women losing their husbands, and overall, there are many people who need to satisfy their instincts on a temporary basis. This could be accomplished through an official agreement or contract between two parties... for whatever the time. This brings an order to the relationship. The fate of the child would be clear, it addressed the idea of the woman in respect of her expenses and she will not be able to marry for a while. Psychologically speaking, this is a legal act, not a forbidden act that everyone is fearful of... In the Shi’ite school of thought, all *ulama* accept this. We believe this is a solution to sexual problems.⁴⁰⁸

⁴⁰⁴ *Ettela’at*, Issue 18, 14 Aban 1364/November 5, 1985. Quoted in Paidar, p. 285.

⁴⁰⁵ Paidar, p. 285.

⁴⁰⁶ *Kayhan*, Issue 25. Quoted in Paidar, p. 285.

⁴⁰⁷ *Zan-e Rouz*, Issue 1045 (Azar 1364/November /1985), pp. 4-5, 52-53, 58. Haeri mentions this interview in Footnote 60 of her article, “Power of Ambiguity: Cultural Improvisations on the Theme of Temporary Marriage,” *Iranian Studies* 19, no. 2 (Spring 1986): pp. 123-154.

⁴⁰⁸ “60 Minutes,” CBS, interview with Hojatolislam Ali Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani, March 8, 1997, accessed June 5, 2011, http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=P-ojq-O_Ecc.

Yet despite Rafsanjani's elaboration of *sigheh*'s advantages in alleviating social dilemmas pertaining to sexual tension, his explanation did not alter public opinion, which, at the time, was generally disapproving towards temporary marriage and saw these types of unions as similar to male-female relationships formed in western cultures.⁴⁰⁹ Although his comments stirred a lively debate in the local press, thereafter *sigheh* was not deliberated publically for more than a decade.⁴¹⁰ Paidar has observed, "Cultural disapproval of *sigheh* prevented its legitimization and institutionalization during the first decade of the Islamic Republic despite state propaganda in its favour."⁴¹¹

However, almost two decades later, *sigheh* re-entered public and state discourses as a temporary solution for a growing societal problem —prostitution.

Prostitution on Tehran's Streets

Iran's state media uses an official terminology for prostitution and the women involved in the sex industry. Prostitution is officially translated as *khod-forushi* (selling oneself) and *tan-forushi* (selling of the body). Yet, instead of using the definitions *ruspigari* or *ruspi* for a female prostitute, euphemisms are instead used.⁴¹² The terms *zan-*

⁴⁰⁹ Shahla Haeri, "Marriage and the State in Iran: An Islamic Discourse on Female Sexuality," *Social Research* 49, no 1, Religion and Politics (Spring 1992): p. 205.

⁴¹⁰ Haeri, "Temporary Marriage and the State in Iran: An Islamic Discourse on Female Sexuality," pp. 203-206.

⁴¹¹ Paidar, p. 286.

⁴¹² Colloquial terminology exhibits a wider range for the term prostitute, including the terms *jendeh*, *fahesheh*, and *zanikeh*.

Prostitution is not limited to female prostitutes. According to the news website Baztab-e Emruz, a male prostitutes can be found in sport facilities and recreational centers in wealthy districts of Tehran. See "Khahesh-e Sen-e Ruspigari/A Decrease in Prostitution Age," Baztab-e Emruz, 24 Tir 1391/ July 14, 2012, accessed July 25, 2012, <http://baztab.net/fa/news/10972/>.

e kheyabuni (street woman), *dokhtar-e ferari* (a runaway girl), and more recently *zanan-e asibdideh-ye ejtima'i* (socially harmed women) are mentioned in state media and government agency reports.⁴¹³ The unspecific terminology is reflective, in part, of the official government reticence to admit the existence and prevalence of prostitution countrywide. To date there are no independently confirmed statistics on the number of prostitutes nor is there any systematic research on prostitution in Iran.⁴¹⁴ In 2002, unofficial estimates claimed that approximately 300,000 prostitutes were working in Iran.⁴¹⁵ In 2007, they claimed that approximately 84,000 prostitutes reside in Tehran alone.⁴¹⁶ Government officials dispute unofficial figures, claiming that this part of the social issue is part of a Western plot to corrupt Iranian youth.⁴¹⁷ Their responses usually manifest in two ways: either they deny the existence of prostitution or they provide lower estimates, pointing to inaccuracies and exaggerations in unofficial statistics.⁴¹⁸ For

⁴¹³ Socially harmed women are also referred to as “special women.” See Radio Zamaneh, “Sarpoush bar Vagiyati Oryan/ Covering Up the Naked Truth,” RadioZamaneh.com, 30 Tir 1391/ July 20, 2012, accessed July 27, 2012, <http://www.radiozamaneh.com/society/khiyaban/2012/07/20/17202>. See also Shahidian, p. 186.

⁴¹⁴ Shahidian, p. 186.

⁴¹⁵ Payvand, “Iran Juggles with Taboos, Holds First of Prostitutes and Police,” Payvand.com, December 7, 2002, accessed January 12, 2012, <http://www.netnative.com/news/02/dec/1032.html>.

⁴¹⁶ Hamideh Sadeghi offers a higher unofficial estimate of 84,000 prostitutes living in Tehran. See Hamideh Sedghi, *Women and Politics in Iran: Veiling, Unveiling, and Reveiling* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), p. 239.

⁴¹⁷ Parto Parvin and Arash Ahmadi, “Iran Sets Sights on Tackling Prostitution,” BBC News, July 26, 2012, accessed July 27, 2012, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-18966982>.

⁴¹⁸ In many cases, reticence to speak about prostitution can be the norm, however there are instances when Iranian authorities flatly deny the existence of prostitutes in Iran. In a well-known case, BBC reporter Sue Lloyd-Roberts (who was granted permission by the Ministry of Islamic Guidance to report on social change in Iran) was deported in December 2002 from Iran after interviewing and photographing female prostitutes. Officials told her, “We are deporting you tomorrow morning because you have taken pictures of prostitutes... This is not a true reflection of life in our Islamic Republic. We don’t have prostitutes.” Nasrin Alavi detailed the incident in the book *We are Iran*. See Nasrin Alavi, *We are Iran* (London: Portobello Books Ltd, 2005), p. 156 and “Iran’s Youth Reveal Anger and Sadness,” BBC News, December 10, 2002, accessed January 12, 2012, http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/middle_east/2563413.stm.

instance, Tehran's chief of police Hossein Sajedinia reported in 2011 that there were only two hundred "street women." Iran's Wellbeing Agency disputed this number, reporting that about four hundred female prostitutes are arrested annually in Tehran.⁴¹⁹ Medical researcher Zargooshi quoted an anonymous official who claimed that, outside the capital, about two thousand prostitutes were working in Kermanshah.⁴²⁰ Similarly, in a rare instance of official recognition of this social issue, government official Hodayoun Hashemi from Iran's Social Welfare Organization, a government-run body, admitted, "Certain statistics have no positive function in society; instead, they have a negative psychological impact. It is better not to talk about them."⁴²¹

Despite this reticence, there are many sources elaborating government and police involvement in shutting down prostitution rings.⁴²² According to diverse media reports, there is an intricate and vast network of domestic and international sex work taking place inside Iran and traversing its borders. Although Iran's state press does not typically report on this subject, alternative domestic and international media sources have reported

⁴¹⁹ Kayvan Bozorgmehr, "Head of Sociology Association of Iran announces: Drop in Prostitution Age in Iran," Roozonline, June 15, 2011, accessed January 12, 2012, <http://www.roozonline.com/english/news3/newsitem/article/drop-in-prostitution-age-in-iran.html>.

⁴²⁰ Original source from the now-banned *Nowrooz*, September 17, 2001, Issue 14. Per Zargooshi's results, "The majority of the prostitutes and *sigheh* wives in Iran exchange sex for survival. Being uneducated survival sex workers, they accept risky sex behaviours easily. *Sigheh* wives are an important source of infection. The very high rate of persistent infection despite standard treatments is disturbing. Our ideal is a world in which nobody is obliged to enter commercial sex work. In the meantime, however, there is an urgent need to offer medical care and education to sex workers as needy patients in a safe and unprejudiced environment. Denying the presence of such realities as prostitution and sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) because of their disagreement with cant claims and official propaganda, does not eradicate the facts but results in catastrophic public health problems." See J Zargooshi, "Characteristics of Gonorrhea in Kermanshah, Iran," *Sex Transmission Infection Journal* 2002, Issue 78, no. 6: pp. 460–461, accessed August 21, 2011, <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed?term=characteristics%20of%20gonorrhea%20in%20kermanshah#>.

⁴²¹ Parvin and Ahmadi, "Iran Sets Sights on Tackling Prostitution."

⁴²² "Postscript: Female Sex workers and Fear of Stigmatisation," *Sex Transmission Infection Journal*, Issue 81 (2005): p. 180.

on police raids of brothels and prostitution networks in Tehran.⁴²³ In 2002, Agence France Presse reported that Iranian authorities were stepping up their raids of prostitution rings. Police commander Mohammad Bagher-Ghalibaf said, “[The police] are ready to pick up all street women and prostitutes in less than 72 hours across the country.”⁴²⁴ In June 2002, the Basij paramilitary forces made a rare public announcement that raids on brothels had resulted in 48,900 arrests.⁴²⁵ In Tehran, even the elite Revolutionary Guards were involved in the prostitution crackdown, raiding four prostitution rings “centered on Tehran which had been sending young Iranian girls to France, Britain, Turkey and Arab countries of the Gulf and arrested more than 100 people.”⁴²⁶ Clearly, there is domestic sex work going on in Iran, despite the official government proclamations to the contrary—and Iranians are aware that brothels exist. (In 2001, *The Hindu* reporter interviewed an elderly gentleman, about the “peculiar gender situation” in Iran. The journalist observed his response: “There was a long pause and then, as if he had decided that there was no more delicate way to express himself this gentleman said, ‘Teheran had the biggest red

⁴²³ Ibid. Agence France Press reported in May 2001 that Tehran police had closed down a brothel, arresting 25 people. The same year, India’s *The Hindu* reported from Iranian newspaper *Omid-e Jahan* that Iran would no longer hand out passports to Iranian women expelled from Gulf countries—they were accused of involvement in prostitution rings. In the same article, twenty-nine brothels were reported closed, all located in northern Tehran. See Sohrab Morovati, “Iranian Police Declare War on Prostitution,” Agence France Presse, May 22, 2002, accessed January 12, 2012, http://www.uri.edu/artsci/wms/hughes/war_on_prostitution.

⁴²⁴ Morovati, “Iranian Police Declare War on Prostitution.”

⁴²⁵ Alavi, p. 153. In raids of brothels of Mashad, journalist Sohrab Morovati reported that about 150 people, including 44 women, were arrested; eight brothels were shut down and items believed to aid in procuring prostitutes, such as mobile phones, cars, motorcycles, alcohol and pornographic films were also confiscated. See Morovati, “Iranian Police Declare War on Prostitution,” Agence France Presse.

⁴²⁶ Ibid.

light district in the Middle East before the revolution. Do you think this has all gone away?”⁴²⁷)

Deterring Prostitution through Khaneh-ye Efaf (Chastity Houses)

The reported increase in prostitution —leading to rising arrests and punishment for those involved in the illegal sex industry— has compelled certain religious officials to consider regulating prostitution. This strategy is a reversal of an approximately three-decade policy of criminalizing prostitutes. In 2002 Ayatollah Mohammed Mousavi Bojnordi, a former member of the Supreme Judicial Council, was quoted as saying, “We face a real challenge with all these women on the street. Our society is in an emergency situation.” In an interview with *Etemad* newspaper, he stated, “If we want to be realistic and clear the city of such women, we must use the path that Islam offers us.”⁴²⁸ Just as Rafsanjani had argued, Bojnordi reasoned that Islam, as a model and all-encompassing life system, was capable of responding to every societal dilemma, including prostitution.

The same year, independent news organizations inside Iran began publishing reports that the government was intending to regulate prostitution through the establishment of *khaneh-ye efaf* (chastity houses). The basic idea behind this program was that women and men would convene in small and private centers, being monitored

⁴²⁷ Kesava Menon, “Flesh is Weaker in Moralistic Iran,” *The Hindu*, January 27, 2001, accessed December 2, 2011, <http://www.hindu.com/2001/01/28/stories/03280009.htm>.

⁴²⁸ Quote originally from *Etemad* newspaper, though excerpted in: Nazila Fathi, “To Regulate Prostitution, Iran Ponders Brothels,” *New York Times*, August 28, 2002, accessed November 20, 2011, <http://www.nytimes.com/2002/08/28/world/to-regulate-prostitution-iran-ponders-brothels.html>.

by government agencies, and conduct sexual activity in legal and religiously sanctioned brothels.⁴²⁹ The proposals were based on “providing safe sex for men of the city.”⁴³⁰

Initially the government was silent about these reports; it would not officially confirm that there were any designs for such a program. Only after media reports began piecing together more details did the authorities begin to relay any information.⁴³¹

According to the research findings of WomeninIran,⁴³² a now-defunct, Tehran-based social science, journalist, and feminist research group, several government agencies were involved in designing and implementing this program.⁴³³ WomeninIran reported that the judiciary, Tehran municipality, and the Ministries of Corrections and the Interior were each participating in this government plan.⁴³⁴ However, among this group, the only ministry to offer information to the press was that of the Interior, which emphasized the prevention of disease and sexual health of Iranians.

⁴²⁹ “Rahandazi-ye Khaneh-ye Efaf baraye-e Tarvij-e ‘*Sigheh*’ dar Shahroud ba Estefadeh az Yek Veblog/ A Chastity House Established in Shahroud Advocating *Sigheh* via Blog,” *Al-Arabiya*, January 8, 2011, accessed November 20, 2011, <http://www.alarabiya.net/articles/2011/01/08/132677.html>.

⁴³⁰ Floor, p. 273.

⁴³¹ Floor writes that conservative newspaper *Afarinesh* published a few details about the program. *Ibid.*, p. 273.

⁴³² Established in 2001 in Tehran, Women in Iran opened after reformist newspapers were targeted and shut down by the government. An online venture, Women in Iran consisted of women journalists and academics writing on topics that championed women’s rights causes on the Internet. Their stories were often written anonymously and integrated UN international conventions, such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the Convention for the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW). Writing in both Persian and English, they covered domestic news, provided investigative reports, and highlighted stories of human rights abuses such as domestic violence, the situation of female prisoners, and women’s right to enter soccer stadiums—topics that were normally considered taboo and thus not covered in the main press. Information from Women in Iran website and their former researcher Leila Mouri.

⁴³³ Women in Iran, “Tarh-ha-ye Jaygozin-e Khaneh-ha-ye Efaf?/Alternative Plans for Chastity Houses?” WomeninIran.com, 2 Mehr 1381/ September 24, 2002, accessed November 22, 2011, <http://www.womeniniran.com/news/02-07-81/1-02-07-81.htm>.

⁴³⁴ “Tarh-ha-ye Jaygozin-e Khaneh-ha-ye Efaf?/Alternative Plans for Chastity Houses?” WomeninIran.com.

Ashraf Bornudi, the Society Deputy for the Minister of Interior argued that a “specific strategy” needed to be designed with which to address the relationship between men and women in the Islamic Republic, especially concerning protecting their health.⁴³⁵ According to a preliminary plan for *khaneh-ye efaf*, prostitutes would be provided with a health card, which they would receive after obligatory health checkups. This card, affiliated with the Ministry of Health, would grant them access to public health facilities. Couples would then go to special centers, such as hotels, where they could consummate their union without police interference.⁴³⁶ In August of the same year, it was apparently agreed that the Social Council would begin collecting expert opinions on these legalized brothels. By the end of August, an internal memo had circulated around government agencies discussing plans for licensing a particular institute to handle *sigheh* contracts. Proponents of this plan argued that “chastity houses” would help eradicate social corruption.⁴³⁷

Researchers from WomeninIran reported widespread disapproval from the public.⁴³⁸ *Markez-e Amar-e Mosharekat-e Zanan* (The Statistical Center for the Participation of Women), a Tehran-based women’s advocacy group, challenged the Ministry’s plans, stating that sexual contact was just one way in which sexual diseases could spread. They argued that the Ministry’s focus on the prevention of AIDS through

⁴³⁵ Ibid.

⁴³⁶ Alavi, p. 157.

⁴³⁷ Charles Recknagel and Azam Gorgin, “Iran: Proposal Debated for Solving Prostitution with ‘Chastity Houses,’” *Pars Times*, August 7, 2002.

⁴³⁸ Women in Iran, “Tarh-ha-ye Jaygozin-e Khaneh-ha-ye Efaf?/Alternative Plans for Chastity Houses?”

this route would be ineffective.⁴³⁹ After news of these plans was leaked to the public, it stirred much controversy, prompting immediate denials from officials. Hojjat al-Eslam Rahami, then head of the Political Conscience division of Iran's security forces, announced that the chief architect behind these proposed chastity houses had been identified and arrested.⁴⁴⁰ The arrest—which cannot be independently confirmed if, in fact, it did happen—was perhaps an attempt to placate public disapproval while simultaneously denying that the plan had any official government approval, or even existed. It is generally believed that plans for *khaneh-ye efaf* were abandoned soon after.

Indeed, the controversy surrounding the proposals for chastity houses was based on the possibility that the government would commence regulating brothels in the Islamic Republic. But these plans were also problematic because implicit to this policy was the involvement of particular demographic groups. According to WomeninIran, the likelihood that destitute women and female runaways would participate was strong.⁴⁴¹ Was the government indirectly providing a location and reason for these women to seek sex work as a quick source of income?

Capping the Youth's Sexual Desires

Year 1997 marked the emergence of a reformist-backed civil-society agenda, implemented by the Khatami administration, which was curtailed a decade later via the monopolization of power in the hands of Iran's conservatives factions. Since the

⁴³⁹ Ibid. Their protests were launched following reports that housewives were becoming infected with HIV after having only sexual contact with their husbands—meaning that they were participating in sexual relations outside of their permanent marriage in the form of *sigheh* and/or extra-marital affairs.

⁴⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴⁴¹ Ibid.

dissolution of the Iran-Iraq war and the end of Rafsanjani's tenure as president, Iran's political structure had undergone significant changes in leadership, transitioning from the reformist-leaning Ayatollah Muhammad Khatami to conservative politician and former mayor of Tehran, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad. By the 2000s, financial grievances had augmented in the face of mounting international sanctions, coupled with government economic mismanagement. These factors caused young couples to delay entering permanent marriage. More than ever, Iranians were finding themselves out-priced by the housing market and unemployed—as university degrees did not automatically grant them employment.⁴⁴²

During Ahmadinejad's first presidential term, *sigheh* was again broached publically in 2007. In this period, as economic problems surmounted, government officials began worrying about the short-term and long-term consequences affecting a specific demographic—Iranian youth. Young couples were encouraged to enter temporary marriages to avoid prolonged courtships in which they would be tempted to engage in pre-marital sex. At a conference in Qom, cleric Mustafa Pourmohammadi, then minister of the Interior, announced that the government should promote *sigheh* among the youth, as it would provide a stabilizing and preventive force in the face of society's moral corruption.⁴⁴³ Pourmohammadi said, "We must not be afraid in promoting the temporary

⁴⁴² For studies on Iran's macro-economic trends in the 1990s, including unemployment rates of men and women, see Parvin Alizadeh, *The Economy of Iran: The Dilemmas of an Islamic State* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2000) and for the 2000s, see Ali Gheessari, ed., *Contemporary Iran: Economy, Society, Politics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, Inc., 2009).

⁴⁴³ "Tarvij-e Ezdevaj-e Movaqat va Ma-van'e-e Shar'ei Orfi/ 'Promoting Temporary Marriage' and Religious and Customary Obstacles," BBC Persian, 15 Khordad 1396/June 5, 2007, accessed September 11, 2011, http://www.bbc.co.uk/persian/iran/story/2007/06/070605_ka-short-marriage.shtml. Pourmohammadi was Interior minister from August 2005 until August 2008. According to a report from Human Rights Watch, he was implicated in the 1988 execution of Iranian prisoners in Evin prison when he was a representative of

marriage of youth in a society in which God rules; this problem must be bravely addressed across the country.”⁴⁴⁴ In another media report, he elaborated:

The increase in the marriage age in this country has caused many problems. Is it possible that Islam is indifferent to a 15-year-old youth into whom God has put lust? We have to find a solution to meet the sexual desire of the youth who have no possibility of marriage. Islam is a comprehensive and complete religion and has a solution for every behaviour and need, and temporary marriage is one of its solutions for the needs of the youth.⁴⁴⁵

Here, Pourmohammadi concentrates on the progressive nature of Islam, which is perceived to offer Muslims solutions for modern-day dilemmas, using Islamic institutional structures and tenets.⁴⁴⁶ Moreover, explicit in the aforementioned government officials’ reflections on temporary marriage is the prevailing assumption that human sexuality naturally requires satiation. As such fulfilling sexual desires is best handled through heterosexual marital relations—or as Shahidian has defined, “healthy hetero-marital” unions, designed in accordance to Shi’a marital traditions.⁴⁴⁷ In this framework, human sexuality is viewed as normal as long as it is confined to specific marital arrangements. In the event that sexuality should err towards deviant expression—meaning that couples should engage in premarital sex or be tempted by lust—temporary marriage is a sufficient mechanism to help subdue errant sexuality.

the Ministry of Information, in charge of determining executions. See Human Rights Watch report of the accusations levied against him: Human Rights Watch, “Pour-mohammadi and the 1988 Prison Massacres,” HRW.org, December 2005, accessed December 12, 2011, <http://www.hrw.org/legacy/backgrounder/mena/iran1205/2.htm>.

⁴⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁴⁵ “Iranian Minister Backs Temporary Marriage to Relieve Lust of Youth,” *The Guardian*, June 3, 2007, accessed September 11, 2011, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2007/jun/04/iran.roberttait>.

⁴⁴⁶ Haeri, *Law of Desire*, p. 96.

⁴⁴⁷ Shahidian, p. 186.

Sigheh and Human Sexuality: Engaging and Limiting Human Desires

Underlying this emphasis on *sigheh* is the notion that human sexuality is inherently insatiable—in other words, that men and women are voracious consuming subjects of sexual desire. The opinions of Rafsanjani, Bojnordi, and Pourmohammadi on *sigheh* demonstrate a traditionalist understanding of human sexuality, constructed in Twelver Shi'a theological and legal discourses. It is believed that the overall aim of *sigheh* is to satisfy sexual urges.⁴⁴⁸ Shi'a *ulama*, such as Ayatollah Motahhari, have argued that *sigheh*—in legal terminology, *nikah mut'a*—is “one of the brilliant laws of Islam.”⁴⁴⁹ It is sanctioned by leading Shi'a Jaf'ari jurisprudential interpretations of a *Qur'anic* verse—chiefly *al-Nisa* 4: 24.⁴⁵⁰ *Hadith* sources, too, cite that the Prophet Muhammad permitted *sigheh*. However the Shi'a believe that Caliph Omar, whom the Shi'a do not acknowledge as the rightful blood heir and next in line to the Prophet Muhammad, had outlawed the practice.⁴⁵¹

Shi'a *ulama* have specified the circumstances within which legitimate and lawful interactions between men and women in a *sigheh* union are permitted to take place—

⁴⁴⁸ In *sigheh* marriage, children conceived during these unions are considered legitimate.

⁴⁴⁹ Motahhari (1981), p. 52. Quoted in Haeri, p. 96.

⁴⁵⁰ Shireen Mahdavi, “Women and the *Shi'i Ulama* in Iran,” *Middle Eastern Studies* 19, no. 1 (Jan. 1983): p. 22. See also Shahla Haeri, “Power of Ambiguity: Cultural Improvisations on the Theme of Temporary Marriage,” p. 124. According to *Qu'ran* 4:24, the verse reads, “Women already married, other than your slaves, God has ordained all this for you. Other women are lawful to you, so long as you seek them in marriage, with gifts from your property, looking for wedlock rather than fornication. If you wish to enjoy women through marriage, give them their bride-gift—this is obligatory—though if you should choose mutually, after fulfilling this obligation, to do otherwise [with the bride-gift], you will not be blame: God is all knowing and all wise. See *The Qur'an*, trans. by M.A. S. Abdel Haleem (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), p. 53.

⁴⁵¹ Haeri, “Power of Ambiguity: Cultural Improvisations on the Theme of Temporary Marriage,” p. 124. For an explanation of pre-Islamic Arabia practices of temporary marriage, see I.K.A. Howard, “*Mut'a* Marriage Reconsidered in the Context of the Formal Procedures for Islamic Marriage,” *Journal of Semitic Studies* 20 (1975): pp. 82-92.

such as in the event of long periods of travel like a pilgrimage or an educational sojourn.⁴⁵² Because sexual segregation is a committed priority of the Iranian *ulama*, maintaining propriety between *na-mahram* (non-blood- or kin-related) parties is legitimized through this form of legal consent.⁴⁵³ The consent in this marriage means that both parties agree to either a sexual or nonsexual (platonic) interaction.⁴⁵⁴ Just as Rafsanjani had alluded to in his interview, both parties in a *sigheh* arrangement determine the contract's expiration, the precise nature of the services rendered, and if financial compensation will be exchanged.⁴⁵⁵ The time period may last from as little as one hour up to ninety-nine years.⁴⁵⁶ (Once a *sigheh* contract expires, a woman must wait the expanse of two menstruation cycles to assure that, in the event of a pregnancy, the father can be identified and held accountable.)⁴⁵⁷

Haeri, author of *Law of Desire: Temporary Marriage in Iran* —and one of the

⁴⁵² Haeri, "Power of Ambiguity: Cultural Improvisations on the Theme of Temporary Marriage," pp. 81-83. Another circumstance worth mentioning is the usage of *sigheh* for the purposes of procreation. For instance, in the event that a wife has abnormal menstrual cycles or cannot naturally conceive, a Muslim man may seek out the sexual services of a number of unmarried women. See Haeri, "Cultural Improvisations on the Theme of Temporary Marriage," pp. 136-137.

⁴⁵³ For instance, when a male and female want to remain in nonsexual contract and the woman remain unveiled in his presence, their agreement should stipulate the nonsexual nature of their interaction.

⁴⁵⁴ A temporary marriage requires no witnesses or registration although in Iran, some clerics encourage the registration of *sigheh* unions.

⁴⁵⁵ Ibid., p. 54. According to Shi'a Grand Ayatollah Sistani, "It is permissible for a man and a woman to recite the formula of the temporary marriage (*mut'a*), after having agreed on the period of marriage and the amount of *Mehr* (another form of dowry or *mehrieh* in Persian). Hence, if the woman says: *Zawwajtuka nafsi fil muddatil ma'lumati 'alal mahril ma'lum* (i.e. I have made myself your wife for an agreed period and agreed mahr), and then the man immediately responds thus: *Qabiltu azzewaja lenafsi hakaza* (i.e. I have accepted the marriage as was agreed.), the marriage will be in order. And the marriage will also be in order if they appoint other persons to act as their representatives." See "Fixed-time Marriage," Grand Ayatollah al-Uzma Seyyed al-Sistani website, date not published, accessed July 2, 2012, <http://www.sistani.org/index.php?p=616687&id=1190>.

⁴⁵⁶ Shahla Haeri, "Power of Ambiguity: Cultural Improvisations on the Theme of Temporary Marriage," *Iranian Studies* 19, no. 2 (Spring 1986): p. 124.

⁴⁵⁷ This period of abstinence is known as *'idda*. See Ibid., pp. 57-58.

foremost contemporary experts on temporary marriage practices in Iran— argues, “Islamic ideology on marriage and sexuality is celebrated by the Shi’i *ulama* as being positive, self-affirming, and cognizant of human needs... Celibacy, on the other hand, is considered evil and unnatural.”⁴⁵⁸ According to Haeri, the Shi’a *ulama* justify *mut’a* marriage on the basis of human nature, which is dichotomized into male and female sexualities. The distinction between the two helps maintain social order.⁴⁵⁹ *Sigheh* unions are temporary, preventive solutions to the “animalistic” sexual needs of men —necessary in times when their sexual desires reach insatiable levels.⁴⁶⁰ In “Shi’i ideology, the man is assumed to be driven by his sexual drives, to have ‘animal’ energy.”⁴⁶¹ Male sexual drives are also described as “volcanic” and in need of containment and satisfaction through morally acceptable means.⁴⁶² Women, by contrast, are perceived to be the sources of energy, to be “nature itself... something that is life giving and life threatening, frightful and fascinating.”⁴⁶³

Yet in this dichotomy of sexualities, male sexuality —if conducted within the confines of a legal marriage contract— is considered legitimate, natural, and expected. It is instinctual, natural, and central to the propagation of an orderly Muslim society. By contrast, female sexuality is perceived as a form of “enslavement” because “‘by nature’

⁴⁵⁸ Haeri, *Law of Desire*, p. 4.

⁴⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 64.

⁴⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, especially pp. 23, 167, 203.

⁴⁶¹ *Ibid.*, p. 203.

⁴⁶² *Ibid.*, p. 64.

⁴⁶³ *Ibid.*, p. 203.

they cannot refuse to yield; it is their nature to want to be taken.”⁴⁶⁴ Mir-Hosseini adds, “Control of women’s sexuality finds its legitimacy in the *fuqaha*’s (Muslim jurists) conception of marriage.”⁴⁶⁵ For unrestrained sexual relations between two non-married persons encourages vice, uncontrolled urges, which could potentially lead to psychological unrest.⁴⁶⁶ Sexual relations between a “husband and wife” however offered the best example of male-female, spousal complementarity in a controlled and “traditional” framework.⁴⁶⁷ Thus to satiate these alleged desires and instincts, temporary sexual partnerships are pursued—sanctioned by Islamic law and doctrine and even encouraged by Iranian authorities.

Considering Sigheh as a Prostitution Variant

Even despite the 2002 controversy stemming from the plans for government-regulated brothels, state and clerical rhetoric continue to insist that there is no connection between *sigheh* and prostitution. The late Mohammad Kazem Shari’atmadari, the leading Grand Ayatollah in Qom and whom Haeri interviewed in 1978 for her fieldwork, asserted

⁴⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁶⁵ Ziba Mir-Hosseini, “Sexuality, Rights, and Islam: Competing Gender Discourses in Postrevolutionary Iran,” in *Women in Iran from 1800 to the Islamic Republic*, ed. Lois Beck and Guity Nashat (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 2004), p. 207.

⁴⁶⁶ Haeri, “Temporary Marriage and the State in Iran: An Islamic Discourse on Female Sexuality,” p. 202.

⁴⁶⁷ What constitutes husband and wife in Islamic legal terminology faces an entirely different reality in practice, wherein these terms carry many discrepancies in the domain of temporary marriage. In both permanent and temporary unions, the husband (*hamsar* or *shohar* in Persian) occupies an identifiable, stable status. The role of husband is identifiable as a singular individual in that heterosexual relationship. Yet the term “wife” appears more ambiguous by virtue of its non-singularity; the term “wife” can apply to more than one woman as her role as spouse can be replicated by the presence of another female spouse. Hence, a Muslim wife can be, officially and in accordance to *shari’a*, one of four permanent wives, provided that just treatment by the husband is extended equally amongst the other wives. Indeed, multiple wives married to one man in a permanent union only constitute a very small segment of Iranian society.

that *mut'a* was not legalized prostitution. He asserted “this to be an erroneous understanding, typical of what foreigners think about *mut'a*.”⁴⁶⁸ Shi'a clerics generally view *sigheh* as a sexual safety value, which is available to Muslims in certain circumstances. For Ayatollah Sayyid Reza Borghei Mudaris specifically, *sigheh* is available to financially strapped persons—for instance, a widow who “answers her needs because if she doesn't, she will have psychological problems.”⁴⁶⁹ In other cases, men who cannot afford a permanent marriage should consider *sigheh*, as well as a “married man with domestic problems who needs ‘a kind of medicine.’”⁴⁷⁰

Haeri contends that calling *mut'a* (*sigheh*) another variation of prostitution would be a mistake. She explains, “The problem is more complex than the apparent similarities might suggest.”⁴⁷¹ There are many important debates circulating in both scholarly and public discourse about the interwoven relationship of *sigheh* to women's sexuality, prostitution, economic stability, and extramarital affairs. However, to deny the links between the two is to ignore both the important social realities and the demographic changes taking place in prostitution. More so, there is recent evidence that government policy, to some extent, is aware of the problems associated with prostitution and is responding accordingly. As case-in-point (and thus, as a direct critique of Haeri's point that *sigheh* is not a variant of prostitution) is the proposed establishment of chastity houses. Why would the Ministry of the Interior incorporate *sigheh* into this program if

⁴⁶⁸ Ibid., p. 157.

⁴⁶⁹ Nadya Labi, “Married for a Minute,” *Mother Jones*, March/April 20120, accessed November 10, 2011, <http://www.motherjones.com/politics/2010/03/temporary-marriage-iran-islam>.

⁴⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁴⁷¹ Haeri, *Law of Desire*, p. 2.

temporary marriage is not, in some significant way, considered a mechanism by which prostitution can be legitimized and thus regulated?

Who Participates in and Benefits from Sigheh?

According to the academic literature on *sigheh*, there is a general consensus formed about temporary marriage—that it is not celebrated to the same level as a permanent marriage. Haeri explains, “This form of marriage lend themselves to a wide range of manipulations, negotiations, and interpretations of the institution on both symbolic and practical levels.”⁴⁷² In a permanent marriage, sexuality “is celebrated by Shi’a *ulama* as being positive, self-affirming, and cognizant of human needs.”⁴⁷³ By contrast, *sigheh* is generally looked down upon. As social scientist Mir-Hosseini has argued, temporary marriage is a “socially defective marriage.”⁴⁷⁴ In an interview with the American magazine *Mother Jones*, Mir-Hosseini reiterated her opinion that *sigheh* is not an ideal or celebrated partnership because “women who enter this kind of marriage never talk about it.”⁴⁷⁵ The stigma is even more pronounced when the dynamic of the temporary contract is sexual in nature. For those women involved, they are more likely to hide or deny their participation.⁴⁷⁶ Paidar explains, “Those who practiced it tended to

⁴⁷² Haeri, “Power of Ambiguity: Cultural Improvisations on the Theme of Temporary Marriage,” p. 125.

⁴⁷³ Haeri, *Law of Desire*, p. 5.

⁴⁷⁴ Ziba Mir-Hosseini, “A Response to Shahla Haeri’s *Review of Marriage on Trial, A Study of Islamic Family Law in Iran and Morocco*,” *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 30, no. 3 (Aug., 1998): pp. 470-471.

⁴⁷⁵ Labi, “Married for a Minute.”

⁴⁷⁶ Haeri’s article on the *sigheh mu’ta* provides a more thorough account of this practice. Interestingly enough, there is a debate between Mir Hosseini and Haeri over the general practice of temporary marriage, which is worth reading. See Mir-Hosseini, “A Response to Shahla Haeri’s *Review of Marriage on Trial, A Study of Islamic Family Law in Iran and Morocco*” and Shahla Haeri, “A Reply to Ziba Mir-Hosseini,”

keep their activities secret and this also applied to the clerics who fervently defended its philosophy.”⁴⁷⁷ Haeri adds, “*Sigheh* is a pejorative term that has been colloquially applied to a woman who is temporarily married, but the term is not applied to a man.”⁴⁷⁸ In fact women who do become *sigheh* do not generally celebrate this kind of union.⁴⁷⁹

However, for Iranian feminist Shahla Sherkat, *sigheh* has a potentially positive, transformative effect on societal understandings towards women’s sexuality. Sherkat, a prominent women’s activist and former editor and publisher of *Zanan*, a feminist journal closed by authorities in February 2007, has argued that *sigheh* can offer a particularly emancipatory direction for perceptions on a woman’s virginity and sexual rights. In a *New York Times* interview, she enumerated the benefits to *sigheh*: “First, relations between young men and women will become a little bit freer. Second, they can satisfy their sexual needs. Third, sex will become depoliticized. Fourth, they will use up some of the energy they are putting into street demonstrations. Finally, our society's obsession with virginity will disappear.”⁴⁸⁰

However several research studies conducted in Iran suggest that these benefits have yet to materialize in a meaningful way.⁴⁸¹ According to the 2009 research findings

International Journal of Middle East Studies 30, no. 3 (Aug., 1998): pp. 471-472.

⁴⁷⁷ Paidar, p. 286. Quoted in Haeri, p. 165.

⁴⁷⁸ Haeri, *Law of Desire*, p. 50.

⁴⁷⁹ Mir-Hosseini explains, “...*mut’a* marriage is stigmatized and socially unacceptable, involves no celebration, establishes no common residence, and is often done in secrecy.” See Mir-Hosseini, “A Response to Shahla Haeri’s Review of *Marriage on Trial*” and Haeri, *Law of Desire*.

⁴⁸⁰ Elaine Sciolino, “Love Finds a Way in Iran: ‘Temporary Marriage,’” October 4, 2000, accessed September 12, 2011, <http://www.library.cornell.edu/colldev/mideast/tmpmrig.htm>.

⁴⁸¹ See “*Sigheh*: Niyaz-e Mali, Mabna- ye Tahghir-e Zan-e Irani/*Sigheh*: Financial Need, the Reason for the Denigration of Iranian Women,” *Gozareh* 215, no. 19 (Bahman 1388/February 2009): p. 10.

published in the monthly journal *Gozareh*, from a group of Iranian social scientists affiliated with the Sociological Society for Women's Studies, the primary reason behind a woman's agreeing to a temporary marriage is financial compensation. Moreover, there are crucial differences in how this compensation is realized depending on the demographic group. As stated in the *Gozareh* article, "Women who are *sigheh* usually have a history of societal hardships or are divorced or they have husbands who have problems with addiction, betrayal, and family violence; or, they do not accept responsibility."⁴⁸² Additionally, there are emotional and financial reasons that draw women into temporary marriages—the primary reason being financial, since they receive little help from Iran's welfare organizations to mitigate their economic duress.⁴⁸³ They contend that *sigheh* partners are typically poorly educated.⁴⁸⁴ Likewise, they have a poor general knowledge of sexual health; diseases such as AIDS and hepatitis are unknown to them.⁴⁸⁵ (This ignorance can also be attributed to the limited, sexual health education programs in Iran's school curriculum.)⁴⁸⁶

⁴⁸² "Sigheh: Niyaz-e Mali, Mabna- ye Tahghir-e Zan-e Irani/Sigheh: Financial Need, the Reason for the Denigration of Iranian Women," *Gozareh* 215, no. 19 (Bahman 1388/February 2009): p. 10.

⁴⁸³ Ibid., p. 10. The authors also note that this financial stress is gender-related; women, they state, have much more difficulty entering the workforce than men. In my own interviews conducted in 2011 in Tehran, I spoke with two women who mentioned that they had entered *sigheh* as a way to sustain a romantic relationship with married men, who had no intentions of divorcing their permanent wives. Both women were professional women in their mid-thirties who were in *sigheh* relationships with older men.

⁴⁸⁴ Ibid., p. 11.

⁴⁸⁵ Ibid. As for the male demographic that participates in a *sigheh* relationship, *Gozareh* reported that only three percent of men are believed to be against *sigheh*. As for the men who are generally associated with entering into *sigheh* partnerships, *Gozareh* does not positively characterize them. Male participants to *sigheh* are described as *vashy*—a term in Persian that connotes both wild and violent characteristics. With their *sigheh* spouses, they engage in *gheir materof-e jensi* (non-standard sex, presumably meaning risky sexual positions) and often believe that by making threats and using money as their advantage, they can behave in any manner with these women. Married men, in particular, are portrayed negatively, as their reasons for *sigheh* partnerships are based on their wives' alleged failures: for instance, husbands describe

In another study, researchers found that people were entering temporary marriage because it was more financially feasible. Permanent marriage is being delayed simply because it was too expensive to get married. According to psychologist and family counselor Dr. Ali Asghar Kayhania, there is a rise in this predicament because men are being discouraged to enter permanent marriages because the *mehriyeh* (dowry) agreed to in a permanent marriage are often out of financial reach for these men.⁴⁸⁷ Moreover, fewer men are becoming homeowners or their families cannot afford to purchase properties for them, and thus the idea of a newly (permanently) married couple resettling in a new place is too difficult. As a secondary solution, young women agree to temporary marriages because they do not want to incur additional hardships for their partners, who would otherwise be responsible for compensating *mehriyeh* in the case of divorce.⁴⁸⁸ (Rising gold prices also affect a man's decision to enter a permanent or temporary marriage, especially if the *mehriyeh* amount agreed to by the bride's family is a financial impossibility for the groom.)⁴⁸⁹

their wives as being sexually cold or emotionless, or they do not become sexually aroused by their husbands. In no manner did the husbands admit to their own personal failures or misgivings.

⁴⁸⁶ Ibid. Only in 2011 did the Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance and the Ministry of Health and Human Services permit the release of a sexual education DVD detailing how to have pleasurable sex between spouses, entitled *Ashnayeh Mahboub* (The Beloved Companion). Upon its release and within the time span of one month, the DVD was no longer available across Tehran pharmacies; the video is now available online.

⁴⁸⁷ *Mehriyeh* is a payment owed to the wife upon marriage that is typically requested in the event of a divorce. It is an essential condition for the legality of marriage and also a wife's right to request. For an in depth explanation of *mehriyeh*, see Mir-Hosseini, *Marriage on Trial: A Study of Islamic Family Law* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2000), pp. 72-83. See also Zahra Tizo, *Domestic Violence in Iran: Women, Marriage and Islam*, pp. 39-44.

⁴⁸⁸ "Sigheh: Niyaz-e Mali, Mabna- ye Tahghir-e Zan-e Irani/Sigheh: Financial Need, the Reason for the Denigration of Iranian Women," *Gozarash*.

⁴⁸⁹ In January 2012, rising inflation caused the value of gold coins to skyrocket. The number of *sekeh* (gold coins) is often the bargaining factor in the formulation of *mehrieh* in a permanent marriage contract. Legally speaking, *mehrieh* is one of the most important structural components of the traditional Islamic

Sociologist Parvaneh Hooshmand suggests that financial sustainability is a secondary reason underlining *sigheh* partnership. Her research suggests that the chief motivating force behind entering a *sigheh* is material desire.⁴⁹⁰ She interviewed fifty urban middle and upper class women on the practice of temporary marriage, and her findings suggest that temporary marriage is used as sexual currency, wherein sex can be offered in exchange for housing, a meal, or even easy cash.⁴⁹¹ Hooshmand claims that in a *sigheh* arrangement, sexual intercourse means material gifts are expected—or that women must use sex as a method to convince their temporary “husbands” to give them something they want.⁴⁹² She argues that this expectation of an exchange does not appear in long-term or permanent marriages, wherein sex is not used as part of the quid pro quo.

For a study on the number of male participants in *sigheh*, there is a 2006 report published by the government’s Statistical Center of Iran, which is responsible for census-taking and preparing statistics of state policies and programs. According to its findings published in *Ebtekar News*, married men were more inclined to have *sigheh* partnerships than single men.⁴⁹³ The statistics showed that, among Iran’s general population, the

marriage and must be indicated in the marriage contract itself. The groom’s acceptance of *Mehrieh* is often determined by the number of *sekeh* he agrees to pay the bride in case of emergency or the dissolution of marriage. This agreement is sound provided that the union is consummated “Afzayesh-e Ezdevaj-e Movaqat pa-be-pa-ye Qeimat-e Sekeh/The Rise in Temporary Marriage on Pace with the Rise in Gold Coins,” *Asr-e Iran*,

5 Bahman 1390/ January 25, 2012, accessed January 27, 2012.

<http://www.asriran.com/fa/news/198672/سکه-قیمت-پای-ب-پا-موقت-ازدواج-افزایش>

⁴⁹⁰ See Parvaneh Hooshmand, “Sexualities. Practices. Iran,” in *Encyclopedia of Women in Islamic Cultures: Family, Law and Politics* 3, ed. by Suad Joseph and Afsaneh Najmabadi, pp. 384-386 (Leiden: Brill Publishing, 2005).

⁴⁹¹ Hooshmand, “Sexualities. Practices. Iran,” p. 385.

⁴⁹² Ibid.

⁴⁹³ Permanently married women are not permitted to enter *sigheh* relationships, be they sexual or nonsexual. Haeri explains, “A fictive nonsexual *sigheh* with a married woman is...perceived to be

number of men and women between the ages of twenty and sixty constituted thirty-seven million people. Within this population, two million had *sigheh* relationships between the ages of twenty and fifty. Of the male correspondents, more than two-thirds who pursued temporary marriage were married men, whereas less than one-third of the male correspondents were single.⁴⁹⁴

These aforementioned studies reflect not only the diverse practices and public opinions about *sigheh*, but also the crucial factor of compensation. It is not simply, as the government claims, human sexual desires motivate men and women to enter into temporary unions. Fatimeh Sadeghi, a political scientist and former professor at Islamic Azad University, maintains,

...in our [Iranian] society many women agree to become *sighehs* mostly because of distress due to economic pressures and the inability to provide their own means of subsistence. When a woman becomes a man's *sigheh* under such circumstances, she is in essence engaging in a fundamentally unequal exchange. It is her distress over providing her means of subsistence that forces her to agree to become a *sigheh*. On the other hand, given the disagreeable character of *sigheh* in our culture, many of these women are compelled to keep the relationship a secret from neighbors and family members. It is even worse when an unwanted child results from the relationship.⁴⁹⁵

The social reality attests to the fact that for many women, *sigheh* is knowingly used as a form of financial protection and welfare. Government rhetoric, however, does not

threatening because it symbolically infringers on the husbands' exclusive right of ownership to his wife's wifely duties and, for that matter, poses a threat to the purity of his seed." See Haeri, *Law of Desire*, p. 93.

⁴⁹⁴ "Mokhalefan-e Ezdevaj-e Movaqat Cheh Migouyand?/ What Do the Opponents of Temporary Marriage Say?" *Ebtekar News*, Issue 949 (12 Tir 1386/ July 3, 2007).

The government does not publish recent statistics about the status of *sigheh* usage among Iranians.

⁴⁹⁵ Fatemeh Sadeghi, "'Temporary Marriage' and the Economy of Pleasure," trans. Frieda Afary, Tehran Bureau online, March 15, 2010, accessed October 3, 2011, <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/tehranbureau/2010/03/temporary-marriage-and-the-economy-of-pleasure.html>.

consider this variable, and instead focuses on the purported lustful inclinations of the youth.

Modern-day Madams and the Changing Demographics of Prostitution

In December 2011, Habibollah Farid, the director of the Societal Victims Bureau of the State Welfare Organization, reported that fifty percent of women involved in prostitution are married and consider themselves middle class.⁴⁹⁶ His findings provide recent data about the status of women sex workers in Tehran, which showed that the majority of women sex workers were generally poor, illiterate, and unmarried.⁴⁹⁷ (Recall Varvayyi's dissertation, which discusses what transpired following the illegalization of prostitution in 1979 and the living conditions of street prostitutes working in various sites throughout Tehran.) Farid suggests that economic survival is no longer the main reason for entering prostitution; recently, more prostitutes turn out to be middle-class women with moderate salaries who prostitute themselves as a "second job."⁴⁹⁸ According to Amnesty International, "Married women are sometimes forced into prostitution by their

⁴⁹⁶ See "Tanforoushi baraye Afzayesh-e Keyfiyat-e Zendegi/Prostitution for the Purpose of Improving Quality of Life," *Salamat News*, 22 Azar 1390/ December 2, 2011, accessed January 20, 2012, <http://salamatnews.com/viewNews.aspx?ID=38047&cat=12>. See also "Sazeman-e Behzisti: Bish az Panjah Darsad-e Kargaran-e Jensi, Zanan-e Mote'ahel Hastand/ State Welfare Organization: More than 50 Percent of Sex Workers are Married Women," BBC Persian, December 12, 2011, accessed January 12, 2012, http://www.bbc.co.uk/persian/iran/2011/12/111212_l21_sex_worker_iran.shtml.

⁴⁹⁷ "Tanforoushi baraye Afzayesh-e Keyfiyat-e Zendegi/Prostitution for the Purpose of Improving Quality of Life," *Salamat News*.

⁴⁹⁸ "Sazeman-e Behzisti: Bish az Panjah Darsad-e Kargaran-e Jensi, Zanan-e Mote'ahel Hastand/ State Welfare Organization: More than 50 Percent of Sex Workers are Married Women," BBC Persian.

husband to feed their drug habits or as a result of an abusive relationship. If arrested, they risk being charged with adultery and, if convicted, execution by stoning.”⁴⁹⁹

In an interview with Iran’s *Sharq* newspaper, analyst Saieed Madani elaborated Farid’s assessment. He reported that “95 percent of women sex workers in Tehran” are literate.⁵⁰⁰ The medium age for women sex workers had dropped by three years, wherein girls between the ages of fourteen and fifteen were reportedly entering the sex market.⁵⁰¹ (This drop in age is significant, given that in July 2000, the average age of prostitutes had dropped from twenty-seven to twenty years.)⁵⁰² Among the population of female prostitutes whom were interviewed, 11.7% claimed they were virgins the very first time they prostituted. In addition, 11.8% of the female sex workers were presently living with their own husbands.⁵⁰³ However, for those women who chose prostitution even though they had modest incomes, Madani cited two reasons: economic mobility and accumulation of material wealth. The reasons why a woman entered the sex market were not only based on economic necessity but also on enhancing quality of life and increasing material possessions.⁵⁰⁴ Indeed, both Madani and Farid emphasized that these women

⁴⁹⁹ Amnesty International, *Iran: End Executions by Stoning Report* (London: Amnesty International Publications, 2008), p. 7.

⁵⁰⁰ “Sazeman-e Behzisti: Bish az Panjah Darsad-e Kargaran-e Jensi, Zanan-e Mote’ahel Hastand/ State Welfare Organization: More than 50 Percent of Sex Workers are Married Women,” BBC Persian.

⁵⁰¹ The article compares the medium age to figures from 1969, but it does not state explicitly what the medium age is in year 2012. See ““Tanforoushi baraye Afzayesh-e Keyfiyat-e Zendegi/Prostitution for the Purpose of Improving Quality of Life,” *Salamat News*.

⁵⁰² Muhammad Ali Zam, *Bahar* newspaper, July 2, 2000. Quoted in Alavi, *We are Iran*, p. 158.

⁵⁰³ “Tanforoushi baraye Afzayesh-e Keyfiyat-e Zendegi/Prostitution for the Purpose of Improving Quality of Life,” *Salamat News*.

⁵⁰⁴ “Sazeman-e Behzisti: Bish az Panjah Darsad-e Kargaran-e Jensi, Zanan-e Mote’ahel Hastand/ State Welfare Organization: More than 50 Percent of Sex Workers are Married Women,” BBC Persian.

were at the beginning of the spectrum of prostitute types. Once they entered the “cycle” of the profession, they would become exposed to drugs and sexually transmitted diseases and would need additional psychological care.⁵⁰⁵

Consuming Insatiable Desires

In Iran, to state that prostitution is illegal is to equivocate about its actual presence. Not only do the police and government authorities endorse policies that are arguably cosmetic, but also they are also complicit in implementing strategies that enable prostitution—yet publicized as an “Islamic” practice. This is not to say that clerical authorities encourage sleeping with “fallen woman”—nay, quite the opposite. Some clerics have interpreted paid, sexual liaisons within the framework of temporary marriage as a method of maintaining social order. Yet one result is that in the face of economic duress, prostitution has been integrated into the discourse of marriage via temporary marriage contracts.

Indeed, prostitution is a delicate issue of social, economic, and political importance. At the height of the Iranian Revolution, some considered it a societal blight. Its practice and regulation was blamed on the liberal, westernized policies of the Pahlavi regime, and it was often presented as an example of the overall moral decline of the Iranian people during this reign. Ayatollah Taleghani regarded prostitution as a social necessity, akin to the fundamental presence of a toilet in a house. In the post-revolutionary era, prostitution is both conceptually and physically emancipated from saturnine dwellings of red-light infamy. After 1979, the physical site of prostitution

⁵⁰⁵ Ibid.

enters a conceptual leviathan —money being exchanged for sexual services becomes reconfigured as a procedural activity in a legal, marriage contract. Popular religious commentaries on human sexuality are identified as the theoretical and legal sources upon which to support the usage of *sigheh* for young adults, veterans, and men, in general. By 2002, there are reports of clandestine, government proposals for chastity houses.

In this chapter on the study of prostitution in the post-revolutionary period, there are two parallel, yet codependent, discourses motivating one another: the state discourse of prostitution and the discourse of *sigheh*. In both, the notion of insatiable, consuming sexuality underscores the reasons for the existence and regeneration of the sex industry and why temporary marriage is argued as a necessity in maintaining social order.

Intimately tied to the *sigheh*-prostitute phenomenon is an epistemological shift wherein the destruction of the red-light “site” of prostitution leads to the re-configuration of prostitution discourse in Iran to include men’s and woman’s perpetually motivating sexualities. Yet what does the repeated emphasis of the desiring man and woman suggest about human beings —that essentially they have no control over their sexual desires and bodies? Moreover, are human relationships just about lasciviousness and fornication? Should solutions to socioeconomic problems always consider these two notions?

As this research demonstrates, the technologies of subject formation are used to market both male and female citizens as Muslim subjects who are desiring consumers, too. Yet the onus of responsibility falls significantly on women. Implicit in the Shi’a legal discourse of *sigheh* and the state’s promotion of *sigheh* is the assumption of a passive female sexuality. It is presumed to be the conduit of sexual relations with men. *Sigheh* is promoted as an available, Islamically approved alternative to entering illicit sexual

relationships. However state officials have not encouraged young women to satiate their desires by entering temporary marriages. It is still taboo for women to enter *sigheh*, and, as I discussed in the previous section, women do not usually announce their *sigheh* relationships.

For many Iranians, *sigheh* is understood to be a legitimized form of prostitution in spite of clerical insistence that *sigheh* is best practiced within the stipulations outlined by Islamic legal tradition. The custom and institution of *sigheh* has entered the uncharted terrain of social reality, where diverse sexual practices and human relationships soften the government's red lines designating appropriate and morally-guided conduct in an Islamic society. An immediate consequence of this strategy of encouraging and accommodating *sigheh* — perhaps unintended— is that the concept of (female) prostitute has expanded. Now the concept of prostitute includes a wider range of women from varied socioeconomic backgrounds —meaning, it is uncertain *who* and *what* constitutes and qualifies as a sex worker and as sex work. Moreover, in lieu of a prostitute located within a red-light district, the contemporary version of “prostitute” has penetrated traditional, domestic spaces, taking on the title of “wife,” albeit momentarily. These days, prostitution bears the faces of the middle class, many of whom regard Islamic marital tradition like *sigheh* as a permission-slip to conduct extra-marital affairs or even, as some women have expressed, as a method by which to obtain economic mobility and financial security.

For the penultimate chapter, I turn to a discussion of the regulatory methods of erasure and modification through the handling of artistic representations of women in the social and cultural campaigns of the Islamic Republic.

CHAPTER FOUR

Naked Modesty and the Reformation of Statues in Post-revolutionary Iran

A cleric could not walk through the university with those scenes on the grass, in classes, in streets. We could not go to government offices. If you stood in front of a desk, you would commit a sin, because there was a nude statue [an unveiled woman] behind the desk. —Hojjat al-Eslam Ali Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani¹

Introduction

The former President of Iran does not mince his words: when a cleric stands before an unveiled woman, the encounter is one of sexual impropriety; the opportunity for decadence abounds. Rafsanjani's anecdote illustrates that the presence of an unveiled woman evokes unnecessary temptation, especially for a believer seeking to maintain his piety and moral constitution. Although the impending sin is not elucidated, it must nevertheless be avoided. Yet evading such an encounter involves two possible solutions: either the believer should not enter official spaces where he should come across women who are "naked," or, women should not be permitted to present themselves as "nude statues" in the workplace.

The legal enforcement of compulsory *hejab* has shown that the latter option was, in fact, the only possible outcome. With the establishment of the Islamic Republic came an Islamicization program that reinforced values of modesty, piety, family, and revolution that are all promoted in the preamble of Iran's 1979 constitution. Afsaneh Najmabadi surmises, "The notion was now emerging of the importance of possessing some singular morality that would help purify a society perceived to be hopelessly

¹ *Kayhan*, airmail edition, 23 Bahman 1364/ February 12, 1986. Quoted in Najmabadi, "Iran's Turn to Islam: From Modernism to a Moral Order," p. 215.

corrupt, as opposed to backward.”² Accusing unveiled women who entered public space of being naked was a tactic often used by many of Ayatollah Khomeini’s hardline supporters to discredit and shame those who opposed observing Islamic *hejab*. These women were subsequently criticized for behaving in a manner perceived to be destructive to Islamic values.³ Women who refused to wear the *hejab* and “flaunt their naked bodies in the streets” were denounced in *Kayhan* editorials as “corrupt, seditious, dangerous and destructive of public honour and chastity.”⁴ During a March 1979 speaking event, Ayatollah Khomeini claimed that Islamic agencies would be committing sin if they were to allow women to enter office spaces while being *lokht* (naked).⁵ According to the *Suleyman Hayyim New Persian-English Dictionary*, *lokht* generally translates as “naked,” “bare,” or “nude.”⁶ In both leaders’ usage of *lokht*, the term refers to a particular expression of nakedness associated with not wearing an Islamic head-cover.

If we set aside Rafsanjani’s lesson and instead focus on the metaphor he invokes (of an unveiled woman as a “nude statue”), is the statue of a woman, situated in a city square, an automatic provocateur, evoking disapproval and shame in the viewer just as Rafsanjani presumes the presence of an unveiled woman does? Does it evoke feelings of impropriety, sin, and immorality in the viewer? If such is the case, what are the institutional approaches to modifying public space and the objects that inhabit that site in

² Afsaneh Najmabadi, “Iran’s Turn to Islam: From Modernism to Moral Order,” *Middle East Journal* 41, no. 2 (Spring 1987), p. 204.

³ Nashat, “Women in the Islamic Republic of Iran,” p. 185.

⁴ *Kayhan*, March 14, 1983. Quoted in Haleh Afshar, “Women, State and Ideology in Iran,” *Third World Quarterly* 7, no. 2 (Apr. 1985): pp. 265-266.

⁵ Shahidian, pp. 97, 99. See also Najmabadi, “Power, Morality and the New Muslim Womanhood.”

⁶ “*lokht*,” *Suleyman Hayyim New Persian-English Dictionary* (Tehran: Librairie-imprimerie Beroukhim, 1934-1936).

order to ensure that men and women—in particularly their gazing upon this object—are shielded from temptation and immoral thoughts?

Much of the literature on the status of women in post-revolutionary Iran focuses on the issue of compulsory *hejab*, analyzing the policy's effects on the daily lives and restrictions experienced by Iranian women. Generally, these studies enumerate and contextualize the ways in which sex segregation and veil ordinances affect women's mobility, dress, and civil and political rights. Ever since Ayatollah Khomeini declared that Iran was a religious, Islamic society and thus should be governed by laws adhering to Islamic criteria, compulsory *hejab* has continued to be a contentious sociopolitical issue. Ashraf Zahedi has argued that this specific policy was “part of the regime's agenda to institutionalize the female identity espoused by the Authenticity Movement which promoted the wearing of hijab as ‘moral cleansing.’ Concealing female hair became the clerics' immediate ‘political project.’”⁷ Ziba Mir-Hosseini has maintained that “paradoxically, the enforcement of *hejab* became a catalyst here: by making public space morally correct in the eyes of traditionalist families, it legitimized public presence.”⁸ A woman's entrance into heterosocial, public space necessitated her observance of a new verbal and bodily language, whereby disciplinary tactics such as sex segregation and compulsory *hejab* certified her legal and legitimate presence in this space. Val Moghadam argues, “But the legal imposition of *hejab* was not about protecting women, and it was certainly not part of any struggle against male sexism: it was about negating female sexuality and therefore protecting men. The idea that women had ‘lost

⁷ Ashraf Zahedi, “Contested Meaning of the Veil and Political Ideologies of Iranian Regimes,” *Journal of Middle East Women's Studies* 3, no. 3 (Fall 2007), p. 89.

⁸ Mir-Hosseini (1999), p. 7.

honor' during the Pahlavi era was a widespread one."⁹ Though the extensive debate on compulsory *hejab* cannot be limited to the reflections of these scholars, they do speak to an overarching trend in the academic literature on women in post-revolutionary Iran that emphasizes *hejab* ordinances and the material and legal ripple effects they had for Iranian women. An extension of this debate, seldom addressed, is the regulation of female sexuality through the disciplinary modification of objects in heterosocial, public space—such as, the veiling of a nude statue in a public square.

There is an extensive history of the destruction of landmarks by powerful elites who compete over a nation's social and political capital. This is especially true for monuments that are held within the collective memory of a populace, for whom a historic victory or an esteemed political icon is concretized in the form of a marble monument and placed in the center of major squares and thoroughfares. By commemorating societal achievements and ideals, these statues are designed to reflect national heritage and pride—of artistic value and wartime significance. Yet timing bears heavy consequences on the visual object of that square: as political regimes pull one hero down from the pedestal and raise another up, the threat of extinction looms large. As the hero of one regime swiftly becomes the antagonist of another, new symbols manifest, new identities are crafted and legacies are re-written in an effort to erase all vestiges of the fallen regime.¹⁰

⁹ Val Moghadam, "Revolution, the State, Islam, and Women: Gender Politics in Iran and Afghanistan," *Social Text* 22 (Spring 1989): p. 45.

¹⁰ I recall two examples: Taliban-run Afghanistan and post-Soviet Russia. In 2001, the Taliban's Mullah Muhammad Omar ordered the destruction of ancient Buddhist cave temples, towering fifty meters in height, in Bamiyan, Afghanistan. According to the Taliban's rigid interpretation of both the *Qur'an* and *sunnah*, the pre-Islamic statues were considered idolatry and thus such figures were ordered destroyed countrywide. (The cave temples were located in three major sites throughout Afghanistan; there are 1000 known cave temples in Bamayan.) See "Taleban dismisses statue outcry," BBC News, February 27, 2011, accessed August, 30, 2011, http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/south_asia/1192195.stm. A similar example of reconfiguring worldviews through the figure of the monument is found in Afghanistan's former invaders,

In the midst of regime change from dynastic to clerical leadership, many Pahlavi-era landmarks and monuments were destroyed. Sculptures of Persian historical and cultural icons were vandalized—a notable instance was the beheading of the sculpture of famed, Iranian classical poet, Ferdowsi, located in central Tehran’s Ferdowsi Square.¹¹ Although statues of women in particular were not subject to the same manner of destruction in the early years after the Revolution, they were dealt with in accordance to the state’s social policies enforcing an “Islamic code of public appearance.”¹²

For sculptures of women, this was translated into material reform by rendering any “obscene” exhibition of the body¹³ as modest and thus suitable for public viewing. Determining which presentations of a statue fell under the category of “obscene” has varied from the offense of a statue displayed without a *hejab* to any hint of female sexuality, such as a sculpture with a noticeable bosom. According to some religious officials I underscore later in this chapter, public space is an arena suitable only for displaying objects that are consistent with Iran’s “societal standards” and exemplify Islamic values; hence any object that contradicts these values should not be exhibited. In the past seven years, the same criticism has been directed at all life-like representations of

the Soviets, whose prominence waned with the establishment of independent Russia. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, Russians sought a re-formulation of the symbolic capital that key Soviet-era monuments posed for the general public during the “critical juncture” of the 1990s. Russian officials sought the removal and relocation of Soviet-era monuments from Moscow’s public spaces; in other cases, throughout this transition period, political elite would alter the composition and design of these monuments’ sites to gain prestige and legitimacy with the public. See Benjamin Forest and Juliet Johnson, “Unraveling the Threads of History: Soviet-Era Monuments and Post-Soviet National Identity in Moscow,” *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 92, no. 3 (Sep. 2002): p. 524.

¹¹ After public protest, the statue was repaired and still remains in the same square in central Tehran.

¹² Abrahamian, *A History of Modern Iran*, p. 177.

¹³ The term “body” refers to individual and whole representations or features of the physical structure of a person, such as hair or limbs.

women, such as mannequins in storefronts, which have been accused of advertising inappropriate (and unlawful) relationships between men and women.

In an attempt to diversify scholarly discussion on the regulation of sexuality in contemporary Iran, I do not limit myself to the discussion of the social control of compulsory *hejab*. Instead, I focus on other cultural, religious, legal, and spatial dimensions within this regulatory framework that determine how and to what extent women's bodies and their representations are disciplined. In this chapter, I review the alteration of specific statues, monuments, and mannequins to point out the strategic application of "Islamic criteria" in the face of robust social change. In what follows, I discuss the controversies surrounding mannequins and three sculptures — "Mard-e Neylabakzan" (The Flute Player), "Mojassameh-ye Fereshteh-ye Azadi" (Angel of Freedom), and "Zan va Mard-e Keshavarz" (Man and Woman Farmers). These three public artworks were once prominently displayed in Tehran's public squares and in front of ministry and municipal buildings. Their subsequent renovation in the post-revolutionary period illustrates how public works of art —especially those representing women— went from being recognized as part of a national, cultural heritage to suddenly being identified as suspicious, immodest, and obscene objects. The historical narrative behind this process of modification in the name of promoting "Islamic values" of public morality, chastity and modesty aids in contextualizing how and in what ways public space underwent significant transformations through the regulation of sexuality.

Studying these pieces helps identify the shifting understandings toward female sexuality alongside the legal, authoritative, and sculptural methods used to re-codify monuments into gender-neutral objects suitable for a morally-guided, Muslim public

sphere. In what follows, I elaborate the government's efforts to restructure the physical and social dynamics of public space so that the people and objects interacting and situated, respectively, in that space conform to an "Islamic moral imperative."

Gender Paradigms of Space and Social Organization in Tehran

How is public space¹⁴ articulated in Iranian state and religious discourses?¹⁵ Islamic laws on modesty mediate the social construction of public spaces via the modification of physical spaces and regulating social interactions in those spaces. Thus, citizens in public spaces are prevented from gazing upon immodest statues or interacting immodestly with each other. The modesty of interactions is defined by state policy founded in an Islamic conceptual paradigm of gender relationships known as *mahram* and *namahram*.¹⁶ Although this framework is an imperative in Shi'a discourse, this does not mean that this provision is necessarily and fully observed, accepted, and/or practiced by Iranian men and women. However, a brief illustration of a dominant social organization of space is worth our attention.

¹⁴ For more on the division between private and public space within an Islamic context, see Fatima Mernissi, *The Veil and the Male Elite: A Feminist's Interpretation of Women's Rights in Islam* (New York: Basic Books, 1991).

¹⁵ Although this chapter focuses on the conceptualization of public space in the Shi'a Iranian context, there are other formations of public space, as they are practiced and constructed in other contexts of the region, which are also worth future consideration. See Shirley Ardener, ed. *Women and Space: Ground Rules and Social Maps* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1981). For an analysis of spatial divisions in the Algerian context, see Doria Cherifati-Merabtine, "Algeria at a Crossroads: National Liberation, Islamization, and Women," in *Gender and National Identity: Women and Politics in Muslim Societies*, ed. Valentine Moghadam, pp. 40-62 (London: Zed Books, 1994).

¹⁶ Jane Khatib-Chahidi, "Sexual Prohibitions, Shared Space, and Fictive Marriages in Shi'ite Iran," in *Women and Space: Ground Rules and Social Maps*, ed. Shirley Ardener (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1981), p. 112. See also Haeri, *Law of Desire*, p. 76.

The Islamic legal terminology of *mahram* and *namahram* designates marriageability between men and women. Kinship relationships determine the extent and manner of social interaction between opposite sexes.¹⁷ *Mahram* denotes a legal “relationship by blood, marriage, or sexual union.”¹⁸ Parents for instance, are *mahram* to their children, as are brothers and sisters to one another.¹⁹ A *namahram* relation is denoted as “any person of the opposite sex whose kinship does not represent an impediment for marriage.”²⁰ Men and women, who are both unrelated to each other, can become *mahram* to each other through marriage. Haeri expounds, “The *mahram/namahram* paradigm, or rules of segregation and association of the sexes, is one of the most fundamental and pervasive rules of social organization, social relations, and social control in Iran.”²¹ The clerical leadership’s and state agencies’ implementation of this gendered paradigm has been translated into the veiling of women before men who are *namahram* to them.

Yet the construct of *mahram* and *namahram* does not fully explain how apparatuses of the state reconfigured public space to be an “Islamic arena” by invoking the ideal of modesty. This recoding of public space—its meaning, purpose, and parameters— was the outcome of a unique process, involving the demarcation of societal red lines and integrating ethical, religious, financial, and political factors.

¹⁷ Khatib-Chahidi, p. 114.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Khatib-Chahidi describes four categories of *mahram* persons: blood relatives (including half-brothers and sisters, maternal and paternal aunts and uncles); milk relatives (meaning children breastfed by a non-biological woman and including her own biological children); relatives by marriage; and relationships arising from illegitimate sexual unions. Ibid., pp. 116-1117.

²⁰ Ibid., p. 114.

²¹ Haeri, *Law of Desire*, p. 76.

In the Islamic Republic of Iran, public space is a domain that never holds one identity: it is a site of intermixing propaganda, commerce, religious fervor, passionate marches, traffic congestion, clashing lifestyles, and prayer demonstrations. It is also an arena in which codes of conduct and social norms are observed and disobeyed under the watchful eyes of a clerical leadership, morality police, and regime supporters. Iranian citizens are expected to interact in a manner that is mindful of social regulations and policies —many of which are determined by state and religious discourses of modesty and *hejab*.

In the public sphere, the promotion of sexuality that might incite arousal is sinful; for many believers, guarding one's gaze is a necessary tactic in fending off unlawful lust and *tahrik* (arousal) between the sexes.²² As Hamid Dabashi has written, there is a “serenity of a distanced gaze”²³ — of an image, object, or person that does not provoke temptation, but just *is*. In public space, the heterosexual gaze must keep its distance; it should not submit to temptation and desire. Eyes of a believer must be directed away from the object of desire (to “guard their gaze”) —even if this is a statue of a woman in a public square. For even gazing upon a statue is an act of temptation, for it may lead him or her astray by kindling prurient thoughts and illicit actions.²⁴ Hence to control (and

²² Ziba Mir-Hosseini has published several interviews with prominent and high-ranking Shi'a *mujtahids* who offer differing opinions on “guarding one's gaze” with respect to observing *hejab*. See Ziba Mir-Hosseini, *Islam and Gender: The Religious Debate in Contemporary Iran* (London: I.B. Tauris, 1999), pp. 44-45; p. 76.

In Persian, the word *tahrik* refers to bodily provocation in which a man or woman's desires are aroused and thus this arousal triggers an inclination towards that object or person of desire; this instigates or provokes such feelings and, in many cases, bodily reaction (or arousal of the sexual organs), in him or her.

²³ Dabashi, “Body-less faces: Mutilating Modernity and Abstracting Women in an ‘Islamic Cinema,’” p. 377.

²⁴ According to Shi'a discourse on sexuality, the natural disposition of a heterosexual gaze is wanton and lustful when not confined to an Islamic marital framework. Controlling this gaze thus involves reigning in

subdue) the gaze, the assumption is that one must exterminate the potential source of moral corruption —and, as I explain via the following example, a monument of a woman erected in a historic city square.

Effacing the Feminine of Baharestan Square

How does a new regime transform the identity of a well-known public site —as an example, a city square that was once the site of a national monument or famed sculpture of the previous regime?²⁵ In the case of the Islamic Republic of Iran, Iranian officials and leaders have both modified and discarded those objects that contradict its ideological vision. As Forest and Johnson have argued, “Official memorials, monuments, and museums play a unique role in the creation of national identity because they reflect how political elites choose to represent the nation publicly. By erecting memorials in public space, states and interest groups attempt to define the historical figures that become national heroes and establish the historical incidents that become the formative events of a nation's identity.”²⁶ Consider, for instance, the landscape of posters and billboards across Tehran. Across the city, advertisements and panels of revolutionary slogans are posted on highways and the walls of apartment buildings, announcing the state’s ongoing commitment to the 1979 Revolution, redefining social values and norms.²⁷ As a visual

unrestrained male and female sexualities. The *Qur'an* (24:30 and 24:31) instructs believing men and women to lower their gaze and guard their modesty. For more on the discourse of the gaze in Islamic texts, see Ziba Mir-Hosseini, *Islam and Gender: The Religious Debate in Contemporary Iran* (New York: I.B. Tauris, 2000), pp. 64, 68, 94.

²⁵ Ibid., p. 526.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Haggai Ram, “Multiple Iconographies: Political Posters in the Iranian Revolution,” in *Picturing Iran: Art, Society and Revolution*, ed. Shiva Balaghi and Lynn Gumpert (London: I.B. Tauris, 2002), p. 90.

topography and pictorial archive, they narrate a ubiquitous expression of Ayatollah Khomeini's supporters: a national story of triumph in the form of an Islamic Revolution, which rid the nation of a pro-West, secular dictatorship.²⁸ Yet, in this process of crafting a new legacy and heritage for Iran, monuments of both symbolic and secular heroines, for instance, have disappeared from public space. In their stead are the monuments of Islamic philosophers, war martyrs, and veiled mothers.²⁹ As an example, in the proceeding paragraphs, I detail the reconstruction of identity and purpose for Tehran's Baharestan Square in the post-revolutionary period.

Newspaper headings mark June 24, 2009 as a bloody day of protest in Baharestan Square.³⁰ Less than two weeks after the presidential re-election of Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, protests continued to swell in the streets; city squares became crucial meeting points for both dissenting citizens and security forces, whose fist-to-fist battles were photographed and videotaped, later broadcast on major international news programs and posted and commented on across the Internet. Two days earlier, a young woman by the name of Neda Agha Soltan was shot in the head and died instantly. Public anger skyrocketed, as video images of her death went viral. Government threats of reprisal were

²⁸ See Arjomand (2009); Abrahamian (1982, 2008); Rostam-Povey (2012).

²⁹ For instance, in Tehran, a bronze statue of a veiled mother (sculpted by Zahra Rahnavard) is erected in Mothers' Square (also called Mohseni Square) at Mirdamad Boulevard. At Imam Khomeini Square (formerly Toupkhaneh Square during the Pahlavi period), there is a monument honoring Iran's pre-Islamic and imperial dynasty, and on top of that structure is a metal sculpture of the word God in Arabic. Hassan Abad Square in the traditional business (Moniriyeh) district of Tehran was renamed to the 31st of Shahrivar Square, however this name did not stick and the square is still referred to by its original name. The 31st of Shahrivar (September 30) marks the day Iraqi forces launched an air and ground invasion of Iran.

³⁰ "Gozaresh-ha az Voghou-e 'Dargeeri' dar Meydan-e Baharestan-e Tehran Hekayat Darad/ Reports of Outbreaks in Tehran's Baharestan Square," BBC Persian, 3 Tir 1388/ June 24, 2009, accessed August 11, 2011, http://www.bbc.co.uk/persian/iran/2009/06/090624_nm_demonstraion.shtml.

not initially successful in deterring Iranians from joining opposition rallies in public squares.³¹



Figure 1: Baharestan Square, June 2011³² and December 2010³³

Baharestan Square was one of several popular gathering spaces where protesters have held opposition rallies. For more than a century, demonstrations have historically taken place in front of Parliament's old headquarters, which directly face the square.³⁴ The square has an extensive political history in the modern formation of the Iranian state—from the Iranian Constitutional Revolution (1905-1911) to the present Islamic Republic. It was once the site of one of Tehran's oldest structures, the palace of Mirza Hossein Khan Sepahsalar, Iran's Prime Minister from 1871 to 1873. In recent years, Baharestan Square has been used as a public exhibition space for government military

³¹ Hamid Dabashi has written extensively about the tumultuous period after the re-election of President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad in June 2009. See Hamid Dabashi, *The Green Movement in Iran* (New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 2011).

³² Tehran's Baharestan Square, June 27, 2011, accessed December 12, 2011, <http://www.panoramio.com/photo/54834343>. Courtesy of Saied Mahmoud Javadi.

³³ Tehran's Baharestan Square, December 22, 2010, accessed December 12, 2011, <http://www.panoramio.com/photo/45391444>. Photographer unknown.

³⁴ Baharestan Square was already well known for holding opposition rallies during the prescient days of democratically elected Prime Minister Mohammed Mossadegh (1882-1967), who was overthrown in a British and American-orchestrated coup d'état.

and artillery shows. In September 2008, the Iranian government staged an exhibition of its “sacred defense,” showcasing a yellow-colored missile in the square’s center and situating armored vehicles under a giant poster of *Velayat-e Faqih* Ayatollah Khamenei.³⁵



Figure 2: Angel of Freedom Statue, Baharestan Square, 1982

Since the square’s construction, several statues of politicians and cultural icons have been located in its center. At present, a statue of Ayatollah Seyyed Hassan Modarres, a supporter of the Constitutional Revolution and a former mentor of Ayatollah Khomeini, is the square’s main center of attraction.³⁶ The bust of this early twentieth century cleric is a relatively recent addition; three decades prior, a winged statue, known

³⁵ Fars News Agency, <http://www.aerocenter.ir/forum/showthread.php?t=3772>. See also “Namayesh-e Moushak-e Shahab-e She dar Meydan-e Baharestan-e Tehran /The Exhibition of Shahab-Three Missile in Tehran’s Baharestan Square,” BBC Persian, 3 Mehr 1387/ September 24, 2008, accessed January 1, 2012, http://www.bbc.co.uk/persian/iran/story/2008/09/080924_mg-shahab3.shtml.

³⁶ For more information on Ayatollah Modarres (1870-1937), see Ervand Abrahamian, *Iran between Two Revolutions* (1982).

as “Mojassameh-ye Fereshteh-ye Azadi,” (Angel of Freedom), was erected in that very site.³⁷ The statue was a gift to Parliament from Sardar As’ad Bakhtiari (1856-1917), a powerful democratic reformer and tribal leader during Iran’s Constitutional Revolution, and later installed in front of the parliamentary buildings in 1937 (1316).³⁸ While reviewing the photographic material from women’s journal *Zan-e Rouz*, an important archive for this dissertation’s inaugural chapter, I stumbled upon a doctored photograph of Baharestan Square, printed three years after the Revolution.³⁹ (See Figure 2.) However it was a challenge to locate more pieces of evidence demonstrating the existence and history of this statue. I was not successful in locating other photographs, and public recollection of the statue has waned.

The photograph and accompanying article were published in the February 1982 edition of *Zan-e Rouz*, in the section “Begoo! Begoo!” (Say! Say!), which was dedicated to reader commentary about local domestic and political affairs. In this section, readers voice their complaints and offer suggestions to officials from the Ministry of Labor and other state organizations. (For instance, in this issue, a reader criticizes the incompetent method of ticket collection on city buses.)

As shown Figure 2, there is an “x” marking placed directly on the statue’s bust to prevent the reader from clearly viewing it. (For emphasis, I deliberately circled the “x” marking in red.) The censorship reflects a new editorial policy of *Zan-e Rouz* to not publish images that depict nudity and immodesty. Although not explicitly stated, it is

³⁷ See Afsaneh Monfared, “Baharestan,” Encyclopedia Islamica.com, date not published, accessed July 5, 2012, <http://www.encyclopaediaislamica.com/madkhal2.php?sid=2184>.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ *Zan-e Rouz*, Issue 853 (Bahman 1360/February 1982), “Begoo! Begoo!,” p. 62.

likely that *Zan-e Rouz*'s editors found the exposure of women's form —specifically the contours of her breasts— inappropriate for its magazine audience, even if the majority of its readership were women. The “x” marking is one example of a new direction in the visual depiction of women's bodies deemed permissible for public viewing —that they be represented in more modest forms although not yet veiled. As I discussed in Chapter 1, in 1980, *Zan-e Rouz* re-launched itself as an Islamic lifestyle magazine, publishing articles and images of women whom they characterized as natural homemakers, self-sacrificing mothers and sisters of the Revolution, and pious Muslims observing Islamic *hejab*.

This particular image is significant not only for it having been censored, but also for the title and the reader commentary accompanying it. As shown in Figure 2, the statue itself depicts a defiant pose of a female figure charging forward against the wind, wrapped in swarms of fabric billowing below her feet. Underneath the photograph, the headline reads “Mojassameh-ye Azadi-ye Shahanshahi dar Meydan-e Baharestan” (Imperial Statue of Freedom in Baharestan Square). Presumably the editors changed its name to designate its origins and association to the previous dynasty, when purported symbols of empire were lambasted by those opposed to the Pahlavi regime.

Located directly below the photograph is a short commentary from a concerned *Zan-e Rouz* patron, based in Tehran:

Thank you to those who are responsible for the page, ‘Begoo Begoo,’ it has been some time that I’ve wanted to write a letter and request a response from municipal officials. The issue is that every time I pass by Baharestan Square, my eyes fall upon the scenery of the square and the statue of the winged-woman, whose shape and appearance are against public modesty. I don’t understand how such a statue exists on one side, in front of the buildings of education, whose great mission is to educate and to foster humanity. On the other side is located the Imam Khomeini Relief Foundation, as

well as the Central Committee. I don't know what kind of concept and message this is sending, based on our Islamic, revolutionary rituals and doctrine. This statue reminds us of the Pahlavi's free woman...⁴⁰

After complaining about why the statue had not yet been removed, the reader states his or her expectation: "I hope that these words of caution can be useful for the *sazandegi* (reconstruction) of the slogans and dress⁴¹ of the Islamic society." In closing, the reader says, "Hopes for the success for all of those who are committed to Islam."

Both the photograph of the statue and the reader commentary illustrate a shift in the representations of women permitted for exhibition in print media after the Revolution. In this instance, the presence of an unveiled, curvaceous statue is intolerable to an attentive reader, and thus government officials must be alerted. For the statue infringes new standards of modesty and public morality of the Islamic Republic. Additionally, as the reader suggests, the "Angel of Freedom" is a barefaced reminder of the values of the Pahlavi regime. In the reader's view, an Islamic society cannot be achieved without the removal of such objects that challenge Islamic, revolutionary ideals.

Making Statues Modest: Nakedness in State and Religious Discourses

How does an Islamist state mandate modesty and ensure that it is reflected in public works of art? For statues representing women in particular, does the strategy require the addition of a veil? The answers to these questions lie in the history of the construction and implementation of laws and prohibitions governing social interaction

⁴⁰ See photograph of "Mojassameh-ye Azadi-ye Shahenshahi dar Meydan-e Baharestan," in section "Begoo! Begoo!" of *Zan-e Rouz*, Issue 853 (Bahman 1360/February 1982), p. 62.

⁴¹ The term used in this text is *desaar*, an Arabic term for clothing and dress. The author of the complaint did not use the more common Persian word *poushesh*.

between the sexes and how they came to be internalized in the first decade after the Revolution. In the early summer of 1979, the clergy-dominated Islamic Republican Party (*Hezb-e Jomhuri-ye Eslami* or IRP) had just formed to assist in mobilizing political support for Ayatollah Khomeini and help popularize his doctrine and teachings.⁴² Simultaneously, the leadership of a Supreme Council of the Cultural Revolution (which I discuss later in this chapter), staffed by hardline supporters of Khomeini, set forth new societal red lines prohibiting a wide range of political and social activities.⁴³ These provisions gave expression to ideal standards of morality maintained in a religious, Shi'a society. For Iran's ruling clerical authority, citizens were automatically identified by their religious beliefs and practices —chiefly, as Muslim subjects. Citizens were encouraged to abide by good moral values based on faith, family, revolution, and the preservation of public morality.⁴⁴ The clerical authority put into place new restrictions of sex segregation and, by 1982, they declared that all Iranian women in public settings should observe compulsory *hejab* ordinances or they would be fined or punished. Tangential to these policies were new guidelines on how to lead a moral life—for instance, provisions on how Iranians should behave and dress modestly in consonance with an idealized, morally-guided Islamic society. Subsequently sculptures and other works of art, especially those pieces that depicted the human body in two-dimensional form, were scrutinized within this framework. Uncovered body parts (such as limbs,

⁴²The IRP, an important parliamentary party, was first led by cleric Mohammed Husayn Beheshti, and it was disbanded by the regime in 1987.

⁴³ Misagh Parsa, *Social Origins of the Iranian Revolution* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1989), pp. 297-298.

⁴⁴ For more on the Islamic Republic of Iran's state goals, see *Islamic Republic of Iran Constitution*, amended July 28, 1989, Article 3.

buttocks, and hair) were looked at suspiciously and derided, as they were regarded as pornographic and immoral objects —hence publicly displaying them would lead Muslims astray from staying on the morally righteous path found in an Islamic society.

Fiqh (Islamic jurisprudence) scholars have come to the consensus that the exposure of one's private parts is *haram* (religiously forbidden), although there is some differentiation in identifying *awrat* areas —meaning which body parts must not be left uncovered during *namaz* (prayer) or in the company of *mahram* and *namahram* men and women. The term *awrat* is mentioned several times in the *Qur'an*, as well as in *hadith* literature.⁴⁵ Some *fiqh* scholars state that only the vagina, penis, and buttocks are private parts whereas others contend that for women, their entire bodies are *awrat*.⁴⁶ Shi'a understanding of *awrat* is based on the religious commentaries of the sixth Imam, Ja'far al-Sadiq, which consider *awrat* to include women's bodies, save their faces and hands.⁴⁷ However, this definition of *awrat* is mutable, depending upon the activity being performed and in front of whom. For example, Ayatollah Khomeini —who was a *marja' e taqlid* (Shi'a source of emulation or Grand Ayatollah)⁴⁸— specified that during prayer, the *awrat* of a woman becomes her entire body, including her head and hair,

⁴⁵ See *Qur'an* 24: 58 *Sura al-Nur* and *Qur'an* 33:13, *Sura al-Ahzab*. In Persian, the term is known as *awrat* whereas in Arabic, the term is pronounced as *awra*.

⁴⁶ For more on the concept of *awrat*, see Haideh Moghissi, *Women and Islam: Social Conditions, Obstacles, and Prospects* (New York: Routledge, 2005), pp. 81-83. Moghissi provides a contextual analysis of the many uses of *awrat* in the *Qur'an* and *hadith* literature, which has often been associated with women's bodily weakness. She argues that a more suitable definition should be "inviolable vulnerability," as reference to the broader notions of Arabo-Islamic sanctity and privacy of the home and family.

⁴⁷ According to J'afar al-Saddiq, men's *awrat* is considered to be their genitals and buttocks.

⁴⁸ Grand Ayatollahs, known by their honorary titles of *Ayatollah al-Uzma*, are the highest sources of emulation in Shi'a Islam. They offer specialist interpretations of Islamic texts and law and publish their interpretations in *resaleh*, which ideally should demonstrate their expert knowledge as Shi'a *mujtahid*.

except for her face, hands, and feet.⁴⁹ In this occasion, it is expected that a Muslim woman cover her body completely with a full-length, loose-fitting garment—which, in Iran, is usually a *chador*. In other cases, determining *awrat* is dependent on the company present. In *Tahrir al-Vasileh*, Ayatollah Khomeini asserts that it is *haram* to become naked for the purposes of pleasure and incest, with the exception of undressing or being naked before one's spouse.⁵⁰ (The *Qu'ran* encourages married couples to enjoy looking upon their partners' bodies. By contrast, in private interactions between unmarried, *namahram* and *mahram* men and women, being naked is a sin. Women in particular are expected to be covered from navel to the knee.)

A *marja'e taqlid*'s interpretation of the parts of the human body he considers *awrat* is also evident in *fatwas* on social interactions in which the issue of appropriate clothing is broached. Notably the late Ayatollah Behjat⁵¹ issued a *fatwa* that “men must cover their private parts from other men,” although covering the rest of their body is not *vajeb* (necessary). Certain *marja'e taqlid* have specified the type of clothing appropriate to wear, depending on the occasion.⁵² Grand Ayatollah Naser Makarem Shirazi (who, in 2006, issued a *fatwa* against women entering football stadiums in direct challenge to Iranian president Ahmadinejad's calls to allow them access) stated that some workout

⁴⁹ Ayatollah Rouhollah Khomeini, *Tahrir al-Vasileh*, vol. 1, Chapter 129, lines 3-11.

⁵⁰ Sadr, “Ahkam-e lebas/Clothing Regulations,” p. 229.

⁵¹ For more information about Ayatollah Muhammad Behjat, who died in 2009, see Yasin Jibouri, “Uswat al-Aarifeen. A Look at the Life of Ayatollah Bahjat,” Ahlul Bayt Digital Islamic Library Project, 2005, accessed March 15, 2012, http://www.al-islam.org/uswat_alarifin/. For Behjat's *resaleh*, which is published online, see <http://www.aviny.com/Ahkam/ResalehBahjat/index.aspx>.

⁵² Sadr., p. 230. Grand Ayatollahs have even deliberated over exercise clothing, for its tightness on the body presents potential challenges in preserving modesty and Islamic chastity and might elicit sexual arousal in male and female observers.

clothing has negative consequences on *akhlaq* (morality and manners) and for this reason should be avoided.⁵³

Modern Art Sculptures under Islamic Reform

Solicitation and patronage of modern art sculptures reached a zenith during Muhammad Reza Pahlavi's regime.⁵⁴ Armenian-Iranian artist and curator Marcos Grigorian organized Tehran's first biennial exhibition in 1958.⁵⁵ Iranian artists were traveling back and forth between European capitals and Tehran, training in sculpting and painting ateliers. The 1950s was also the decade in which the faculty of Fine Arts in Tehran University, which had opened an arts academy in 1940 modeled after France's Beaux Arts, developed a full university degree curriculum.⁵⁶ "The highly active 1950s," writes art historian Maryam Ekhtiar, "were followed by the equally spirited 1960s and '70s. These decades saw the opening of Iran to the international art scene, as local artists participated in art fairs, founded galleries, and courted foreign collectors."⁵⁷

After successful exhibitions in Paris and Italy, many Iranian artists returned to Iran, having been commissioned by the Pahlavis to sculpt some of the country's cultural

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ See "Setiz ba Mojassameh/The Struggle with Statues," BBC Persian, August 26, 2002, accessed September 20, 2011, http://www.bbc.co.uk/persian/arts/020826_mj-mojassame.shtml.

⁵⁵ See Ehsan Yarshater, "Namayeshgah-e Bienal-e Naqqashi va Peykarsazi dar Kakh-e Abyaz," *Sokhan* 9, no. 1 (1958): pp. 82-84.

⁵⁶ Habibollah Ayatollahi, *The Book of Iran: The History of Iranian Art* (Tehran: Organization for Islamic Culture and Communications & Center for International-Cultural Studies, 2003), p. 307.

⁵⁷ Maryam Ekhtiar and Marika Sardar, "Modern and Contemporary Art in Iran," in *Heilbrunn Timeline of Art History* (New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2000).

and political icons into marbled works of art.⁵⁸ Among this group of artists are the sculptors Parviz Tanavoli, Jalil Ziapour, Jazeh Tabatabai, and Bahman Mohassess.⁵⁹ During the revolutionary period, many of their works were subjected to attacks. Clerics and supporters of Ayatollah Khomeini claimed that certain sculptures projected allegiances to the former monarchy. The statues were also regarded as advertising anti-Islamic Revolution messages, and were subsequently vandalized or pulled from their original sites.⁶⁰

Conforming Art and Modesty: Hejab-wearing Monuments after 1979

A matrix of clashing motivations underline the vandalism and destruction of public statues, monuments, and other landmarks in the post-revolutionary period. The main reasons are politically and ideologically motivated, on pace with anti-Pahlavi demonstrations and the suspicious fires of cinema houses⁶¹ —at the time, deemed dens of immoral activity— prior to pro-Khomeini revolutionaries securing control of a popular movement against the Pahlavi regime. Based on one of the religious arguments pertaining to statues in Islam, the production and veneration of idols and figurines are prohibited —

⁵⁸ “Setiz ba Mojassameh/The Struggle with Statues,” BBC Persian.

⁵⁹ Tabatabai (d. 2008) was a poet, avant-garde painter, and sculptor. Ziapour (d. 1999) was a modern-art pioneer in painting. Tanavoli (b. 1937) is considered one of Iran’s greatest modern art painters and sculptors.

⁶⁰ Ibid. In the same article, BBC Persian reported that in 1980, many statues considered anti-revolutionary were destroyed. As recent as 2002, Ayatollah Jannati urged attendants of Tehran’s Friday prayer to destroy the statue of “Kaveh Ahangar” in Esfahan because it was anti-revolutionary.

⁶¹ Recall the burning down of Cinema Rex in Abadan, Iran, which I discuss in Chapter Two of this dissertation, in a section describing the attempts to set *Shahr-e No* district ablaze in the first days of the Revolution.

be they of living or nonliving things.⁶² The Prophet Muhammad banned the worship of deities, calling upon Muslims to abandon polytheistic traditions and accept the oneness of God. As narrated by *hadith* traditionalist scholar al-Bukhari, the presence of statues discourages angels from entering a Muslim home.⁶³ The prohibition of statues is extended to artistic renditions of the human form.

Among Shi'a *fiqh* scholars, it is argued that by creating sculptures, artists would mold them in their likeness and thus be inclined to worship something other than God — He, who is already perfect and inimitable.⁶⁴ According to Grand Ayatollah Makarem Shirazi, sculptures of human bodies and animals are problematic, however paintings of them are permitted. In certain cases, the sculpting of human beings is permitted as long as these sculptures or statues are used specifically as materials for war propaganda, as dolls for children, as medical education tools, and as robots that are not used for entertainment purposes but for extending human life.⁶⁵

In mounting demonstrations against Mohammed Reza Shah Pahlavi, landmarks and monuments became integrated into anti-revolutionary slogans against the regime's opulence and its propagation of anti-Islamic, pro-Western values. Certain statues commemorating Pahlavi heroes and statesmen were subsequently vandalized for

⁶² In the early history of Islam, according to Islamic and Christian sources there is an oft-quoted story of an attack on images and statues, marking an "outbreak of iconoclasm," during Yazid II. b. 'Abd al-Malik Caliphate (720-724). See G.R.D. King, "Islam, Iconoclasm, and the Declaration of Doctrine," *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London* 48, no. 2 (1985): p. 267.

⁶³ Yusuf al-Qardawi, *The Lawful and the Prohibited in Islam* (Oak Brook, IL: American Trust Publications, 1999), pp. 98-99.

⁶⁴ See "Hormat-e Mojassamehsazi va Naqqashi / The Sanctity of Sculpting and Painting," *Kavoshi Now dar Fiqh-e Eslami* 4 (Summer and Fall 1374/1995): pp. 62-64.

⁶⁵ See Grand Ayatollah Naser Makarem Shirazi "Comments on Exceptions on Sculptures and Statues," date not published, accessed July 12, 2012, <http://makarem.ir/websites/farsi/estefta/?mit=1121>.

emblemizing not only a pre-Islamic heritage and legacy, but also for honoring political figures perceived to be corrupt and enemies of the Revolution.

In other instances, modern art sculptures tied to Pahlavi values were subject to denunciation and vandalism during the revolutionary period. Sculptures featuring naked torsos and exposed genital areas, such as “Mard-e Neylabakzan” (The Flute Player), as shown in Figure 3, suffered damage because they were regarded as obscene and contrary to Islamic values —the same accusations made of the Pahlavi dynasty before its demise. Standing at four meters tall, “The Flute Player” by the late sculptor and painter Bahman Mohassess depicts a mythological, two-horned creature playing a flute.⁶⁶ Originally sculpted in Rome in 1975 (1353) and commissioned by Empress Farah Pahlavi, the artwork was gifted to Tehran’s City Theatre and remained at the theatre’s entrance until its removal after the Revolution.⁶⁷

Although the reason for its removal was never officially announced, the figure’s exposed buttocks and genital area were likely the cause; left uncovered, the sculpture was criticized for promoting nudity and immodesty. Initially, museum officials stored the piece in the stage area of the theatre (it was later transported to a storage facility in Tehran’s Museum of Contemporary Art), deliberating a more suitable exhibition space for the sculpture. Should officials keep the statue in front of the city theater in its present state? Or should they sculpturally-remedy the figure? According to one proposal, placing *tonikeh* (underpants) to cover the figure’s posterior was suggested, however its poor design did not solve the problem of the exposed backside. “The Flute Player” remained in

⁶⁶ According to the sculpture’s title, it is presumed that the artwork depicts a male creature playing a flute.

⁶⁷ The City Theatre is a theatre complex situated at the northwest corner of Daneshjou Park in central Tehran.

storage until a photograph of the statue leaked online showed that it had been vandalized—the flute player’s two hands were missing, and the nose-flute extension was no longer attached (See Figure 4).

During this period, museum officials provided contradictory statements about the sculpture’s status. Initially they denied reports of any damage, insisting it was safely packed away in storage.⁶⁸ However as public speculation grew, museum director Dr. Habibollah Sadighi, in a 2008 interview with *Iran* newspaper, stated that among the museum’s collection, several pieces of art, including “The Flute Player,” were scheduled for repair. The museum had even publically invited sculptor Mohassess to return to Tehran in order to conduct the repairs.⁶⁹ (In 1969, Mohassess had immigrated to Italy.) Yet Sadighi neither disclosed the culprits behind the damage nor offered a motive for why it might have been intentionally destroyed. Instead, he suggested that the damage might have occurred during the renovation of the City Theatre.⁷⁰ Sadighi conceded, “In addition to being repaired, some part of [the statue] has a specific nakedness. Even though it is not erotic, it must still fit the standards of our society so that we can display it in the garden of Tehran’s contemporary art museum.” Insisting that the work would not

⁶⁸ “Mard-e Neylabakzan-e Ta’atre-e Shahr dar Kojast? / Where is *The Flute Player* at City Theater?” *Rooznameh Aftab-e Yazd*, 28 Aban 1386/November 19, 2007, accessed February 14, 2012, <http://www.magiran.com/npview.asp?ID=1523682>.

⁶⁹ “Mojassameh-ye Mard-e Neylabakzan Bazsazi Mishavad/ *The Flute Player* under Repair,” *Rooznameh Iran*, 13 Aban 1386/December 4, 2007, accessed February 14, 2012, p. 24, <http://www.magiran.com/npview.asp?ID=1531840>. Mohassess did not comply. After the Revolution, most of his public works of art were destroyed. According to Mohassess’s website, he subsequently destroyed all remaining artworks remaining in Iran. See “Biography: Part One of Bahman Mohassess,” Bahman Mohassess Foundation, 2012, accessed February 13, 2012, <http://bahmanmohassess.com/life/biography-part-one/>.

⁷⁰ “Mard-e Neylabakzan, Hamchenan Montazer-e Mohasses Ast/ The Flute-playing Male Statue is Still Waiting for Mohasses,” *Aftab News*, 21 Esfand 1386/ March 11, 2008, accessed February 14, 2012, http://www.aftabir.com/news/view/2008/mar/11/c5c1205239299_art_culture_art_statue.php ن-ی-مرد-اس-ت-م-ح-ص-ص-م-ن-ت-ظ-ر-م-چ-ن-ان-ز-ن-ل-ب-ك.

be censored, he emphasized: “As the director of creative arts, I want to preserve the quality of the statue and also display it— what can I do except ask the artist himself to repair it and adjust it in accordance to societal standards.”⁷¹



Figure 3: Front angle of “Mard-e Neylabakzan” ⁷²



Figure 4: 2010 leaked photograph of damage to statue “Mard-e Neylabakzan”

This call to adjust modern art sculptures to suit the Islamic Republic’s “societal standards” is frequently made, for the phrase has been used as the underlining motivation behind the authorities’ regulation of modern works of art—and, by extension, artistic representations of the human body. Yet the phrase itself is imprecise in meaning, eliciting

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² Photograph of “The Flute Player” from following website:
http://www.lahig.ir/files/fa/news/1389/5/8/7177_473.jpg, accessed February 14, 2012.

questions as to its actual definition and construction. Does the Iranian public know of the explicit and implicit meanings behind the expression “societal standards” and who determines them? More so, is a “societal standard” of the above case constructed and interpreted arbitrarily, or is it constructed in the matrix of globalizing forces, such as consumerism, political factionalism, religious doctrine, and evolving discourses on sex and sexuality?

In the example of “The Flute Player,” the nakedness of a mythical creature is a breach of a “societal standard” evoking responses that range from removal to partial destruction. For other public works of art displayed prominently in front of key government buildings —especially statues of women— their vilification followed a different trajectory in the post-revolutionary period; they were given a second chance at life. Once these sculptures reflected a modest appearance, in their strategic covering and visual subjugation of female sexuality, officials began to consider re-installing them in public sites.

In the next section, I examine the rocky process of translating an Islamic, revolutionary ideal of modesty into a specific female sculpture amidst public criticism. I review how it was modified in the post-revolutionary period after it was considered too controversial to be displayed in public. The statue’s “controversy” lies in the portrayal of an unveiled woman whose body parts are left uncovered, such as its hair and limbs. Because this landmark was regarded as posing a threat to the chaste communal space being projected by the Islamist government, after the Revolution, it was removed from its original site and transferred into an unknown location. Spared from destruction, the sculpture underwent strategic renovations that were specific to the regime’s standards of

modesty and compulsory *hejab*. In the following section, I piece together this sculpture's unique historical narrative, emphasizing this pattern of modification in the name of "Islamic modesty."

Man and Woman Farmers Meet Islamic Reform

This next example is of the sculpture "Zan va Mard-e Keshavarz" (Man and Woman Farmers), an oxidized bronze monument sculpted by Dariush Sane'izadeh and depicted in Figure 5.⁷³ Presently located at the far corner of the courtyard of the Museum of Contemporary Art in Tehran, it was located during the Pahlavi era near the front entrance of the Ministry of Agriculture on Keshavarz Boulevard. The statue depicts a farmer couple surrounded by a collection of symbols from industry and agriculture. For example, it features symbols typically found in communist iconography—a sheaf of wheat and a cogwheel, as shown in Figure 5. However "Zan va Mard-e Keshavarz" does not necessarily express the working-class struggle of a proletariat couple; instead, it evokes a feeling of collaborative work, conducted by two characters engaged in the quiet action of watering a sprout. In this scene, a male farmer appears to be focused on a sprouting plant, which is being watered by his female companion.

After the Revolution, the symbol-laden "Zan va Mard-e Keshavarz" provoked criticism from a particular faction of Khomeini's supporters who sought its immediate removal. Their reasons are attributed to three visual factors: the depiction of an unveiled woman; the short-length of her skirt; and the statue's association with communist

⁷³ "Setiz ba Mojassameh/Struggles with Statues." BBC Persian.

symbols.⁷⁴ The artwork's homage to communist ideals—which undoubtedly rejects religion as a foundation—aggravated the religious and ethical values being avowed by Khomeini's Islamic government. Pressure mounted to remove the statue from public space because it was accused of promoting indecency and societal corruption.⁷⁵ Given the challenges that this statue explicitly posed for the ideals propagated by an Islamist regime, it was eventually removed. The story behind its subsequent modification is examined next.



Figure 5: Photograph of *Zan va Mard-e Keshavarz* sculpture in the courtyard of Tehran's Museum of Contemporary Art, October 2011

The alteration process of “Zan va Mard-e Keshavarz” was by no means smooth but conducted in the face of public ridicule. Officials were initially perplexed over how to

⁷⁴ The history of the communist movement in Iran begins in the late 19th century and early 20th century with the rapid growth of industry and rising discontent against despotism. Iran's Tudeh Party, the oldest political party in Iran, is believed to be the first organized Communist party in the Middle East; it became factionalized during the Pahlavi years. Immediately after the Revolution, Communist supporters became opposed to Ayatollah Khomeini's consolidation of power, for the new leadership did not include representatives of the left parties. For more on the factionalism of opposition parties in the early years of the post-revolutionary period, see Farhang Jahanpour, “The Rise and Fall of the Tudeh Party,” *The World Today* 40, no. 4 (Apr. 1984): p. 153.

⁷⁵ “Setiz ba Mojassameh/Struggles with Statues,” BBC Persian.

re-style the sculpture into an appropriate statue for display; preserving the female figure's modesty and adhering to compulsory *hejab* were prime among their concerns.

Subsequently they made several attempts to reconfigure its structure by altering the attire of the male and female characters. Officials first covered the entire statue with burlap canvas. Yet its awkward placement on the sculpture, at the time located in front of the Ministry of Agriculture, provoked visitor curiosity as museum patrons inquired about what lay underneath its cover.⁷⁶ The tarp cover was subsequently removed and a smaller piece of burlap was placed on the female figure's head to resemble a *rousari* or headscarf. As for her *lokht* (naked) legs, officials placed specially designed trousers, also made of burlap, over them. In its refashioned state, the piece was pilloried —one common joke was that the female farmer appeared to be covered in mud.⁷⁷

Despite the changes applied to this sculpture, officials decided that the piece had minimal value and thus removed it from the ministry's offices, transferring it to the front entrance of Museum of Contemporary Art. In this new site, the sculpture again came under fire, as new complaints arose protesting the work's exhibition and its potential to corrupt the mind.⁷⁸ The piece was moved to the far corner of the museum's sculpture garden, where it remains as it was originally carved and is still visible from North Kargar Street.

The significance of the modification and subsequent concealment of “Zan va Mard-e Keshavarz” from public view lies in the motive and haphazard manner in which this alteration took place —essentially, that by placing an Islamic *hejab* onto a statue, the

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ Ibid.

object would be instantly refashioned into a modest work of art, both suitable for public viewing and reflective of a religious society's new values towards sculptures depicting women (and men). However, despite these efforts at reform, the resulting work was ridiculed and the modification process was abandoned, leaving the statue as it had been originally sculpted. What does this entire modification process relay about the efficacy and value of imposing an enigmatic "societal standard" of modesty onto statues depicting women? Moreover, does the concept of modesty become uniquely identifiable with a material *and* object—the veil—and thus by covering the head and legs of a female statue, this is, by extension, a dependable method by which to one, preserve a woman's modesty and two, construct and control female sexuality, erotic practice, intimacy, and identity?

The answer to these questions lies in the sociopolitical and legal contexts within which these statues were removed and/or modified. In what follows, I investigate the theoretical framework and development of social policies by clerical and state officials to cultivate and reinforce "societal standards" through the concepts of modesty and *hejab*. As evidenced by the repetition and emphasis of these concepts in official state documents, these three concepts are identified as core "Islamic" values and identified as positive values of the Revolution enshrined in Iran's national constitution.

Post-revolutionary State Policy of Hejab and Modesty: Designating Protocols and Societal Standards

Since the early 1980s, legal mechanisms, ad-hoc revolutionary committees, and paramilitary forces answering to high-ranking members of the clerical authority have

been used to implement and enforce a hegemonic vision of Iran as a religious society under the absolute authority of the *Velayat-e Faqih*.⁷⁹ Soon after Ayatollah Khomeini's return to Iran upon the collapse of the Pahlavi dynasty—a triumphant event referred to by many Iranians as the “success of the Revolution”—neighborhood watches formed in major cities, working both as security and as informal committees.⁸⁰ While aiming to keep their communities safe, given the breakdown of the Shah's police force, some of these committees (such as the *Komiteh-ye Enqelab-e Eslami*) also acted as the “eyes and ears” of the Khomeini's supporters in government. As enforcers of the “fundamentalist moral and religious standards upon the residents in their neighborhood,” *komiteh* were the precursors to the morality police known as *Gasht-e Ershad*,⁸¹ a government police force—typically clad in green uniform—that polices activity deemed illegal or in contravention to the cultural and gender policies of the state.⁸² In 1992, three branches of the government's security forces merged to form the police force, known as the *Nirou-ye*

⁷⁹ According to Iranian reformer and philosopher Abdolkarim Soroush, “The Iranian state may be the first ever case of a state that intends to make society religious.” See Masoud Behnoud, “The Ideal Islamic State: An Unattainable Quest,” Abdolkarim Soroush website, January 8, 2006, accessed July 10, 2011, http://www.dr.soroush.com/English/News_Archive/E-NWS-20060108-TheIdealIslamicState-AnUnattainableQuest.html.

⁸⁰ Nader Entessar, “Criminal Law and the Legal System in Revolutionary Iran,” *Boston College Third World Law Journal* 8, no. 1 (January 1988): p. 100.

⁸¹ See Ameneh Youssefzadeh, “The Situation of Music in Iran since the Revolution: The Role of Official Organizations,” *British Journal of Ethnomusicology* 9, no. 2 (2000): pp. 35-61. *Gasht-e Ershad* is part of the police force, under the supervision of the security forces, the Ministry of the Interior and Ayatollah Ali Khamenei. In the large and bustling squares heading to northern Tehran, *Gasht-e Ershad* is the expected presence monitoring public spaces, especially during the summer months. Wherever crowds of different socioeconomic backgrounds and religious persuasions gather and intermix, *Gasht-e Ershad* is likely found to remind them of both sexual difference and observance of the separation of the sexes. At the entrance of parks, such as midtown Laleh Park and uptown Mellat Park, a *Gasht-e Ershad* representative, with walkie-talkie in hand, reminds passersby to observe Islamic custom.

⁸² Entessar, “Criminal Law and the Legal System in Revolutionary Iran,” p. 100. See also “Iran: New ‘Morality Police’ Units Generate Controversy,” RFERF, July 25, 2002, accessed June 14, 2012, <http://www.rferl.org/content/article/1100367.html>.

Entezami-ye Jomhouri-ye Eslami-ye Iran (Security Forces of the Islamic Republic of Iran or the police). (*Gasht-e Ershad* is a sub-branch of this force).

In the 1990s, the clerical leadership became even more sensitive to the liberalizing attitudes of Iranians who appeared to be loosening their adherence to Islamic *hejab*, fearing eminent societal corruption if *hejab* policy was not designed and implemented. (This was a few years before reformist Mohammad Khatami was elected President and news reports proliferated of loosening restrictions on *hejab* policies in public.) In a May 1992 missive addressed to the head of parliament, *Majles* Chairman Mehdi Karroubi, the minister of Culture and Islamic Guidance Mohammad Khatami, and the ministers of the Budget, Finance, Industry, and the Interior established new guidelines of “cultural and societal goals” for preventing “the corruption of public morality.”⁸³ The Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance designated further restrictions on which clothing items were considered inappropriate to be worn in public places and at “centers of cultural production.” New prohibitions banned the usage of see-through veils or veils showing exposed necks and mismatched or colorful shoes.⁸⁴ The letter also obliged restaurants, salons, photography studios, and agencies to observe these guidelines.

Fostering a Culture of Hejab and Modesty

In December 2011, at a meeting for officials from the women’s affairs bureau in Shiraz, the director of Fars province’s office of the Ministry of Culture and Islamic

⁸³ See *Mosavabat-e Comisiyon-e Siasatgozari dar Omour-e Ejraee-ye Mobarezeh-ye Farhangi ba Mazaher-e Fesad* 6877/ *The Ratification of Policy-making Commission regarding Executive Affairs of Cultural Struggle with the Symbols of Corruption* 6877, Islamic Republic of Iran Ministry of the Interior, 19 Ordibehesht 1371/ May 9, 1992.

⁸⁴ Ibid., Objective 4.

Guidance, Mahmoud Alishavandi, announced that a culture of “*hejab* and modesty” should be encouraged when creating works of art.⁸⁵ Emphasizing art’s impact on impressionable audiences, Alishavandi suggested that the creation of art should include the themes of “*hejab* and modesty,” which he argued were valuable in society.⁸⁶ These thematic elements, which are presently fundamental social policy, date back to the late 1990s. From 1982, there were already state policies on observing Islamic *hejab*, however no specific laws or regulations determined how exactly this policy should be implemented and observed in varied social settings. It was only in 1998, a few months after the landslide victory of Khatami, that the Iranian government formulated a broader policy framework on *hejab* with which to cultivate a religious lifestyle and to protect revolutionary-Islamic values.

These edicts came at a time when reformists had won the presidency in 1997, and three years before, they had gained a majority of seats in Parliament.⁸⁷ The reformists’ preliminary efforts at liberalizing social and political facets of the Iranian state culminated in the loosening of press restrictions and, at least momentarily, making overtures to improve relations between Iran and America and Europe.⁸⁸ Amidst these sociopolitical changes, the tempo on the street was similarly animated. For many women

⁸⁵ “Tarvij-e Farhang-e *Efaf* va *Hejab* dar Asar-e Honari Mored-e Nazar Gharar Girad/ Encouraging a Culture of Chastity and *Hejab* in Works of Art Being Considered,” *Mehr News*, 17 Dey 1390/ January 7, 2012, accessed March 13, 2012, <http://www.mehrnews.com/fa/NewsDetail.aspx?NewsID=1503379>. Since 2009, the Minister of Culture and Islamic Guidance is Seyyed Mohammad Hosseini.

⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁷ Abrahamian, *A Modern History of Iran*, pp. 186-188.

⁸⁸ See Ali Gheissari and Kaveh-Cyrus Sanandaji, “New Conservative Politics and Electoral Behavior in Iran,” in *Contemporary Iran: Economy, Society, Politics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), p. 2. For a mid-term assessment of Khatami’s first presidential term and a description of the sociopolitical environment in Iran during the period, see Jahangir Amuzegar, “Khatami and the Iranian Economy at Mid-Term,” *Middle East Journal* 53, no. 4 (Autumn 1999): pp. 534-552.

in Tehran, Khatami's presidency was an opportunity to tamper with the state's dress code restrictions and establish non-governmental advocacy organizations to push for changes in discriminatory parliamentary bills.⁸⁹ Secular women and religious women who participated in the reformist political movement—primarily from the middle and upper classes—began sporting a range of dress styles, such as shorter manteau and trousers, bright-colored scarves, and for some women, tighter clothing overall.

The rapid social changes and public resistance to social and legal restrictions conducted on the streets prompted the Supreme Council of the Cultural Revolution—hereafter, the Supreme Council—to reinforce its Islamist agenda for a disobedient public. The Supreme Council, whose membership is determined by the Supreme Leader and which, until 1989, was founded and led by *Velayat-e Faqih* Ayatollah Khomeini,⁹⁰ is the central government body responsible for guiding Islamicization policies in educational, cultural, and industrial sectors. (The Supreme Council is presently under the control of *Velayat-e Faqih* Ayatollah Ali Khamenei.) For almost two decades, it has sought to expand and strengthen the “influence of Islamic culture” in a Shi'a Muslim

⁸⁹ See Afary (2009) and Farideh Farhi, “Religious Intellectuals, the ‘Woman Question,’ and the Struggle for the Creation of a Democratic Public Sphere in Iran,” *International Journal of Politics, Culture, and Society* 15: 2 (Winter 2001): pp. 315-339.

⁹⁰ In 1982 the Supreme Council was known as the *Setad-e Enqelab-e Farhangi* (Headquarter of the Culture Revolution) and from 1982 to 1987, the membership of the Khomeini-appointed Council did not change. Circa 1375, the Council became known by its present name. Its membership is generally divided into three groups all of whom Khamenei appoints: honorary, legal authorities and ministries, and individual members. On 21 Esfand 1381/ March 12, 2003, new membership was inducted for three-year terms. The last induction of members took place on 17 Khordad 1390/ June 7, 2011. The President, Head of Judiciary, Speaker of Parliament, Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance, and the Ministry of Health and Medical Education are members of the Supreme Council. For a government narrative in Persian of the Supreme Council of Cultural Revolution, see Secretariat of the Office of the Supreme Council of the Cultural Revolution, “Introducing the Supreme Council,” date unknown, accessed March 13, 2012, <http://www.iranculture.org/fa/Default.aspx?current=viewDoc¤tID=1338>.

society.⁹¹ The main objective of their policies is to fortify “human, religious and spiritual values and heartfelt beliefs,”⁹² which would mean concentrating on identifying and reinforcing Iranian-Muslim society’s moral roots and behavior. This very program entailed the institutionalization of “*farhang-e efaf*” (culture of modesty)⁹³ throughout Iranian society by delineating cultural guidelines and implementing security measures that deter social corruption and preserve national morality.⁹⁴

The pairing of the terms *hejab* and *efaf* first appears in both official and legal documents of the Supreme Council of the Cultural Revolution in February 1998, however it becomes a wider campaign slogan for cultural reform in the 2000s.⁹⁵ In 1998, the Supreme Council commenced a national campaign of *farhang-e efaf* via the text *Ousoul va Mabani va Ravesh-ha-ye Ejraee-ye Gostaresh-e Farhang-e Efaf* The Principles, Foundations, and Executing Methods in Spreading a Culture of Modesty. In this text, in order to construct a “culture of modesty,” the Supreme Council emphasizes education in Islamic principles and the fortification of family structures by appealing to ideal representations of the Muslim family. The institution of the family, in particular, is

⁹¹ See Paidar, p. 314.

⁹² Supreme Council of the Cultural Revolution, *The Principles, Foundations, and Executing Methods in Developing a Culture of Chastity*, 14 Bahman 1376/ February 3, 1998, Article 10. See also Shadr, pp. 58-59.

⁹³ In Persian, the word *efaf* is translated as “chastity,” “modesty,” and “virtue.” For this analysis, I have chosen the translation of “modesty” (from the phrase “culture of modesty”) as this definition best illustrates propriety in dress, speech, or conduct. Also, it speaks to the avoidance and rejection of behavior and acts that are viewed as unlawful, un-virtuous, and lust-driven— all of which are invoked in the term.

⁹⁴ Ibid.

⁹⁵ For a brief discussion of the committee’s inaugural years, see Nikki Keddie and Yann Richard, *Modern Iran: Roots and Results of Revolution* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003), p. 250. See also Paidar, pp. 320-321 and Arjomand, *After Khomeini: Iran under His Successors* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, Inc., 2009), p. 69.

emphasized as a natural, cohesive unit within which a culture of modesty should be consolidated “in thought and spirit.”⁹⁶

The campaign also helped define and structure social policy by integrating popular revolutionary-era terms expressed in Iran’s national constitution. The main goal was to establish a “system of modesty that aimed to make the modesty of Iranian women the hallmark of the new Shiite nation.”⁹⁷ In a rather extensive explanation of its goals, the Supreme Council affirmed,

It is necessary to attract the attention of the general public, especially the youth, to the role of modesty and *hejab* in order to create an independent, cultural and national identity for the country and nation; [it is also necessary] to attract their attention to the positive, political effects of this independence [as well as to understand] the enemies’ aims in advocating a culture of nudity, which is a method of cultural attack, by mentioning and describing the evidence and historical incidents [of this attack].⁹⁸

By the mid-2000s, the government campaign to foster a culture of modesty was thoroughly reassessed. In July 2005, the Supreme Council established guidelines for developing this culture of modesty, designating forty-seven objectives in *Rahbord-ha-ye Gostaresh-e Farhang-e Efaf/Guidelines of Developing or Spreading a Culture of Modesty*. Objective 8 clarifies that the philosophy and positive cultural, social, mental, and ethical consequences of *efaf* and *hejab* in various arenas of life.”⁹⁹ The Supreme

⁹⁶ See *Ousul va Mabani va Ravesh-ha-ye Ejraee-ye Gostaresh-e Farhang-e Efaf/The Principles, Foundations, and Executing Methods in Spreading a Culture of Chastity*, Supreme Council of the Cultural Revolution, 14 Bahman 1376/February 3, 1998.

⁹⁷ Negar Mottahedeh, *Displaced Allegories: Post-Revolutionary Iranian Cinema* (Durham: 2008), p. 2.

⁹⁸ *Ousul va Mabani va Ravesh-ha-ye Ejraee-ye Gostaresh-e Farhang-e Efaf*, Objective 5.

⁹⁹ See *Rahbord-ha-ye Gostaresh-e Farhang-e Efaf/Guidelines of Developing or Spreading a Culture of Chastity*, Supreme Council of the Cultural Revolution, 13 Dey 1384/ July 26, 2005. I point to other objectives outlined in the text: Objective 38 comments on producing a culture of chastity through fashion. Objective 45 designates that fabrics and clothing will that promote anti-Islamic values be not be imported to Iran. Objective 30 clarifies that there is no conflict with women wearing the *hejab* and being activities in society.

Council concentrated on establishing a framework of guidelines for a culture of modesty in education, family, social awareness, and regulations of clothing. It also warned that when a society does not abide by these principles, this kind of intransigence would be an “unsettling” force to the moral principles of family in society.¹⁰⁰

Six months after Ahmadinejad was elected president, in June 2006, these guidelines were already standard features in Iran’s social policy. The Supreme Council enumerated a list of requirements for each government agency and designated how each was individually responsible in “fostering and preserving a chaste culture.”¹⁰¹ In the introduction of *Qanoun-e Rahkar-ha-ye Ejraee-ye Gostaresh-e Farhang-e Efaf va Hejab/ The Law of Executing Solution for Developing a Culture of Hejab and Efaf*, *hejab* was introduced as one of the “most valuable cultural and societal manifestations of the Islamic-Iranian civilization.”¹⁰² Of primary importance was elevating the *hejab* in the general public, which the Supreme Council found needed refining when implemented in the domains of media, education, cinema, theatre —among many others.¹⁰³ The Supreme Council left little room for misinterpretation or ambiguity by devising guidelines that were both broad and specific: from specifying the kind of attire worn in official and

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., Objective 8.

¹⁰¹ See *Qanoun-e Rahkar-ha-ye Ejraee-ye Gostaresh-e Farhang-e Efaf va Hejab/ The Law of Executing Solution for Developing a Culture of Hejab and Chastity*, Supreme Council of the Cultural Revolution, 4 Mordad 1384/ January 2006.

¹⁰² Ibid., Introduction, 2006.

¹⁰³ Ibid.

public settings to designating certain practices as good and “bad *hejab*” (mal-veiling),¹⁰⁴ which include wearing make-up in the workplace.¹⁰⁵

Whereas both the 1998 and 2005 documents emphasize the importance of the *hejab* and wearing Islamic covering in its objectives, the titles of these documents emphasize only *efaf* or modesty. The term *hejab* is listed under the umbrella category of *efaf*. In 2006, this emphasis changes, when both terms are present in the title of the executing orders of the Supreme Council. This dual emphasis of *hejab* and modesty suggests that the Supreme Council had begun to regard both concepts as equal and interconnected in the enterprise of reforming Iranian society.

As outlined in *The Law of Executing Solution for Developing a Culture of Hejab and Efaf*, the Supreme Council sought to “give authenticity to the culture of modesty through various appropriate cultural and artistic products.”¹⁰⁶ In this text, the Supreme Council indicates the exact roles of government ministries and agencies for the purposes of institutionalizing a culture of “*hejab* and modesty.”¹⁰⁷ In Objective 4, the Supreme Council states that they should introduce proper cultural standards for advocating a culture of modesty. These standards should be in line with the “national, religious culture” and also provide the “necessary contexts for the advocacy of ideal types of appropriate, Islamic covering through the efforts of institutions, which are responsible for

¹⁰⁴ Mal-veiling means wearing the veil in a manner in which Islamic *hejab* is not fully observed; one typical example is when the head is not covered, revealing a person’s hair. According to Fatemeh Sadeghi, *bad-hejab* is translated as “misveiled,” describing girls who wear *hejab* in order to “accommodate themselves to Iranian legal requirements yet intentionally disregard the spirit if not precisely the letter of the law.” See Sadeghi, “Negotiating with Modernity: Young Women and Sexuality in Iran,” p. 250.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., “General Policies and Methods,” Objective 3.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., Objective 8.

¹⁰⁷ Sadr, p. 66.

making these patterns.”¹⁰⁸ Moreover, under the General Principles section of this text, the Supreme Council affirmed one of its main objectives: to “[strengthen] the moral foundations, principles, foundations of the education for parents —specifically mothers on the topics of modesty and *hejab*— by creating a sensitivity in them regarding the idea [behind this law] is the preservation of chaste culture.”¹⁰⁹

Devising and implementing strategies for this social policy of *hejab* and modesty fell upon executing government agencies. Security forces (*Nirou-ye Entezami*) were put in charge of announcing to the public the limitations and legal criteria of modesty and *bad-hejab* —and also recognizing when infractions took place.¹¹⁰ Subsequently they began policing cinema houses, stadiums, and other public places for acts and dress of impropriety. Ultimately, the security forces would “[make] society aware of the positive ethical and social effects of *hejab* and modesty...by creating cultural and artistic products and advertisements.”¹¹¹ As per the responsibility of policing sculptures, this was the duty of the Ministry of Economy and Properties, whom the Supreme Council had designated to be in charge of banning the importation, production, exhibition and supplying of sculptures, toys, mannequins and pictures that advocate anti-modesty, such as paintings, carpets, newspapers, and other products.¹¹²

¹⁰⁸ See Supreme Council of the Cultural Revolution, *Qanoun-e Rahkar-ha-ye Ejraee-ye Gostaresh-e Farhange- Efaf va Hejab*, “Policies and Solutions,” Objective 4, accessed March 13, 2012, http://www.effat.ir/fa/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=1222306:-1&catid=85:1390-02-26-19-41-09&Itemid=108.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., “General Policies and Methods.”

¹¹⁰ *Qanoun-e Gostaresh-e Rahkarha-ye Ejraee-ye Efaf va Hejab/Law for the Spreading of the Method of Executing Hejab and Chastity*, “Security Forces,” Duty 1.

¹¹¹ Ibid., Duty 9.

¹¹² Ibid., Duty 2.

A close review of these policies suggests that the specifications of the *hejab* and modesty ordinances were defined once social reality began to challenge the Supreme Council's vision and narrative that Iran is (and should be) a modest Islamic society. Increasing public resistance, demonstrated in the altering of styles of dress worn in public, presented a direct challenge and threat to the political elites' control of this narrative. The presence of a woman using heavy makeup, wearing a bright-colored *hejab* and a curve-hugging *manteau*, jeopardizes not only the sanctity of public space but also the founding values of the Islamic Republic. Thus the examples of potential threats to the state's version of modesty began to multiply: from statues of women in city squares to more recently, fashionable women walking on the street. They are known by the term *mankanha-ye khiyabani* (street mannequins) for being colorfully dressed and/or heavily adorned in public.

This body of regulatory policy, devised by the Supreme Council of the Cultural Revolution, has had far-reaching effects, even in the realm of non-artistic renditions of the female body —such as lifeless dummies or mannequins displayed behind a storefront window.. In the next section, I discuss the strategies of Islamicizing mannequins as a prerequisite for their being displayed in storefronts. The story of their modification differs from the aforementioned examples of monuments and statues, as the transformation of a mannequin into a “modest form” is determined by a quick, back-and-forth negotiation between store-owners and officials. The tactics employed by both parties illustrate the mutability of social policies on modesty and *hejab*, in addition to the state's inconsistent and incoherent conceptualizations of women's bodies that appear to support these policies.



Figure 6: Partially-severed head of a female mannequin on Vali Asr Street,

August 2009

Islamic Mannequins and Bodies in Commerce

Haft-e Tir Square is the bustling *manteau* (overcoat) district located in central Tehran. Stores offer a variety of designs—intricately jeweled scarves; *manteau* for every occasion; and knock-offs of European and American brands. Competition here is fierce, for over thirty stores selling *manteau* vie for customers' business. For the shops encircling this square, often the most outrageous and well-styled window displays attract the most customers. In spite of the area's commotion, mannequins in window displays stand out. Because magazines censor clothing advertisements (certain body parts are obscured from view and heads are covered in scarves), storefront displays are optimal forums for potential customers to envision how clothing drapes on female figures. For many Iranians, the freedom to envision something as simple as an overcoat on a mannequin's body is navigated by religious and political red lines.



Figure 7: Mannequins with cut-off breasts, 2006¹¹³

In the early months of President Ahmadinejad's first term, the Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance began clamping down on window displays that exhibited inappropriately-dressed and adorned mannequins. Clerics and authorities believed the unregulated displays of the life-size statues would evoke illicit thoughts in passersby, thus encouraging society's moral depravity.¹¹⁴ Thus they encouraged police to prevent

¹¹³ See Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance, *Qanoun-e Samandehi-ye Mode va Lebas/ Regulations on Re-organizing Fashion and Clothing*, 12 Dey 1385/ January 2, 2007 and 20 Dey 1385/ January 10, 2007, accessed July 4, 2012, <http://honari.farhang.gov.ir/rules-rule7-fa.html>.

¹¹⁴ University settings are not exempt from these regulations on the body. Explicit guidelines are frequently published by semi-official online Fars News Agency, which publishes new dress codes prohibiting particular forms of dress, including body jewelry and headgear that does not come accompanied with some form of a *hejab*. Directed at both men and women, the dress code would ensure all transgressors would not be allowed entrance onto university grounds. These dress regulations banned the wearing of bright colored clothing, tight or shortened slacks, and tattoos that were visible to the human eye. As women would be prohibited from dressing in tight clothing, men would also be ordered to follow similar modes of propriety. They were also forbidden from wearing shorts, body jewelry, and sleeves that were considered too short.

“the promotion of prostitution through mannequins and models.”¹¹⁵ Subsequently all public exhibitions featuring women’s fashions, including catwalks of dress exhibitions, were thoroughly inspected and regulated.¹¹⁶

In September 2008, the same ministry, under the leadership of Mohammad Hossein Saffar Harandi, published extensive guidelines for catwalk models in a seven-part report, *Dastour ol'amal-e Sodour-e Mojavez-e Barpaiti-ye Namayeshga-he Mode va Lebas dar Keshvar* (Rules for the Permission of Clothing and Fashion Exhibitions inside Iran).¹¹⁷ Among the list of prohibited behaviors included the banning of fashion runways themselves, as they were charged with promoting non-Iranian and non-Islamic influences—typically code words for the state’s disapproval of “Western” hegemonic culture—popular in satellite programs broadcast by Iranian communities living outside Iran. Harandi announced that models and designers would no longer be permitted to emphasize the curves of a woman’s body when designing and displaying new fashions. To implement these new standards, models were told to they “should avoid any behavior that would distract visitors’ attentions from the clothes put on display,” according to the “Guidelines for Fashion And Dress Shows.”¹¹⁸ Also stated in the Guideline, “The

¹¹⁵ “Mankan-ha-ye Sineh Borideh dar Vitrine-ha-ye Iran,/ Cut-off Breasts of Mannequins in Iran’s Windowships,” Radio Farda, 12 Azar 1385/December 3, 2006, accessed June 5, 2012, www.radiofarda.com/content/f2_mancan/269913.html.

¹¹⁶ “Iran’s Catwalk Ban is Only the Beginning,” RFERL, September 20, 2008, accessed July 4, 2012, http://www.rferl.org/content/Iran_Catwalk_Ban_Only_The_Beginning/1201610.html.

¹¹⁷ These guidelines were an extension of clothing regulations, *Qanoun-e Samandehi-ye Mode va Lebas*, devised in 2007 (1385). For more information about the “Guidelines For Fashion and Dress Shows” from the Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance, see “Sharayet va Zavabet-e Bargozari-ye Namayeshga-he Mode va Lebas dar Keshvar Eblagh Shod/ Conditions and Regulations on the Exhibition of Fashion and Clothing in the Country Announced,” Fars News Agency, 14 Sharivar 1387/ September 4, 2008, accessed July 1, 2012, <http://www.farsnews.com/newstext.php?nn=8706140288>.

¹¹⁸ Ibid.

wearing of tight and body-hugging clothes and types of makeup that are incompatible with Islamic and Iranian culture are prohibited."¹¹⁹

Three years before these guidelines were published, in 2005, officials in the *Gasht-e Ershad* division of *Nirou-ye Entezami* had already implemented a policy of inspecting mannequins in window displays of popular shopping districts in Tehran.



Figure 8: Half-headed mannequins with severed breasts in

Haft-e Tir Square, June 2010

¹¹⁹ Additionally, during any designer exhibition, it is required that appropriate music should be played, which should be "well-matched to Islamic and Iranian culture," and according to one news report, "should not prompt models to move or walk in an inappropriate manner." See "Iran's Catwalk Ban is Only the Beginning," RFERL.



Figure 9: Display case of veiled mannequins with severed breasts in

Haft-e Tir Square, June 2010



Figure 10: Window display near Haft-e Tir Square, June 2010



Figure 11: Faceless mannequins with flattened chests near Haft-e Tir Square, June 2011



Figure 12: Half-headed mannequin on Vali-Asr Street,

October 2011

The arrival of spring signaled a new inventory of clothes to be showcased in shop windows. In clothing emporiums across Tehran, shop-owners began re-designing their window displays to feature the season's latest "must-haves." *Gasht-e Ershad* began patrolling shopping districts, paying close attention to shortened shirtsleeves and skirt-lengths that would expose a mannequin's shape and body parts. Shop owners were warned: if they placed immodest mannequins in storefronts, they would be fined or shut down. The threats of closure and reduced business and profit¹²⁰ initiated what Fataneh Farahani has described as a process of "Islamicizing mannequins" in window shops—a modification process that began between 2005 and 2006.

Shop-owners moved swiftly in order to meet the plainclothes officers' expectations.¹²¹ First, a few inches were added to short skirts displayed on mannequins.¹²² At the time, mannequins' forms were still curvaceous, and hair was still visible from underneath their *rousari*. Officials found fault with the mannequins' hairstyle, hair color, and the fact that the mannequins were not fully veiled. "Within a few weeks," mannequins were displayed bald, "leaving their luscious hair behind in storage rooms."¹²³ Soon their heads were fully covered by veils, and any unruly hairs were tucked underneath scarves.

¹²⁰ According to a December 2006 Radio Farda news report, sales dropped by twenty percent in comparison to the previous year. See "Mankan-ha-ye Sineh Borideh dar Vitrine-ha-ye Iran/Cut-off Breasts of Mannequins in Iran's Windowships," Radio Farda.

¹²¹ I interviewed four clothing managers in Haft-e Tir in July 2010 and June 2011. They detailed how they would maneuver through *Gasht-e Ershad*'s policies. The managers did not want to provide their names and preferred that I report only on the general procedural interactions between them and the Ministry of Cultural and Islamic Guidance.

¹²² See Fataneh Farahani, *Disaporic Narratives of Sexuality: Identity Formation among Iranian-Swedish Women*, pp. 138-140.

¹²³ Mehrangiz Kar, "Death of a Mannequin," in *My Sister, Guard Your Veil; My Brother, Guard Your Eyes: Uncensored Iranian Voices*, ed. Lila Azam Zanganeh (Boston: Beacon Press, 2006), p. 32.

As these modifications diminished the selling power of the mannequins, on which shopkeepers and designers advertised the upcoming fashion season, owners sought other methods to entice potential customers inside. Without this main showpiece, shop owners became creative out of necessity. Some owners chose to enhance the mannequins' makeup, which again drew ire from officials. The authorities responded by ordering them to minimize the eyeliner and lipstick because they "claim[ed] that the lips of women were aphrodisiac and their eyes stimulating...."¹²⁴ And finally when matching the authorities' expectations seemed improbable, owners began contemplating buying expensive government-approved mannequins. However, some shopkeepers decided to remove the mannequins entirely from their displays, and, in other instances, they began to consider displaying headless mannequins on which to exhibit fashion items.

Despite these many changes, officials disapproved of the mannequins —chiefly, the curvature of the mannequins' breasts that was still noticeable underneath the garments. In lieu of buying new mannequins, storeowners decided to slash the chest area, as it was more cost efficient (See Figure 7).¹²⁵ However this solution did not satisfy authorities, for breasts were still visible underneath the clothing in their jagged forms (See Figures 8 to 10). In other cases, "little coils" were used to assume the shape of a

¹²⁴ Quoted in Kar, *Crossing the Red Line*, p. 35. See also Farahani, p. 140.

¹²⁵ As reported on its website, since 1989, the company Manken-e Yaran (also known as Yaran Company) has been the first and largest producer, distributor, and exporter of male and female mannequins in Iran. With over ten offices across the country, Manken-e Yaran advertises and sells mannequins online through an Iran-based web address to domestic and regional customers. Noticeably, some of the male mannequins are advertised without clothing. Female mannequins, by contrast, are all pictured with clothing, however not all of them have veils. See Manken-e Yaran, accessed July 4, 2012, <http://www.yarancompany.com/index.html>.

wire breast.¹²⁶ “The coils,” Mehrangiz Kar contends, “displayed the mutilated gender of the mannequins.”¹²⁷

The back-and-forth negotiations between shopkeepers and authorities exemplify the haphazard construction and arbitrary interpretation of certain social policies seeking to enforce modesty onto mannequins. It also suggests that the conceptualization of a “modest” woman’s appearance for public display was neither standardized nor easily identifiable. In fact, officials acted without a firm policy in place —often extemporaneously— and thus could not fully explain to storeowners (or even themselves) the proper display of a storefront mannequin. Moreover, every rough alteration of the mannequin proved to be more comical and conspicuous in its outcome. For example, once the mannequins’ breasts were sawed off, their jagged appearance drew special attention —inviting curiosity, guffaws, disbelief, and condemnation.

The most recent depictions of mannequins’ forms are found in Figures 11 and 12. As the photographs show, the mannequins’ bodies appear streamlined; the chest area in particular bears little resemblance to the typical female form —what were once two round breasts now appears to be a flat surface covered by fabric. Representations of female bodies are now depicted as shapeless, revealing what appears to be the slight cleavage of an adolescent girl. Moreover, full- sized, female plastic mannequins no longer come in all shapes and sizes. Often mannequins are deliberately displayed with missing hands, legs, and heads. In their latest manifestation (from June and October 2011), half-headed female mannequins are displayed with flattened chests, hairless, and

¹²⁶ Kar, “Death of a Mannequin,” p. 35.

¹²⁷ Ibid.

almost always with a scarf wrapped around their heads (See Figures 8 and 9).¹²⁸ (“Iran’s concern over the mannequins coincides with high levels of plastic surgery in the country,” remarks Nina Power, “as young women attempt to wrest control over their bodies by way of oddly homogeneous rhinoplasties.”)¹²⁹

The struggle to maintain an aesthetic value in compliance with societal standards determined by clerical authorities and administered by state agencies demonstrates the complexities and crisis that renditions of the human body present in preserving a chaste Islamic culture. The underlining assumption is that, even a dummy—a non-human entity with human-like features—disturbs the ideal of modesty being projected onto an Iranian public.

Conclusion

Imposing a “culture of modesty” is a method of disciplining both men and women not only in how they dress but also in their behavior and social interactions.¹³⁰ However exhibiting a modest self is not just a requirement of both sexes; it also extends to their representations in art. Just as Iranian women (and men) were subject to ordinances of veiling and sex segregation in official spaces, statues and mannequins of women were

¹²⁸ “Mankan-ha-ye Sineh Borideh dar Vitrine-ha-ye Iran/Cut-off Breasts of Mannequins in Iran’s Windowships,” Radio Farda.

¹²⁹ Nina Power, “Mannequins, Manners, and Mutilation,” *Cabinet*, Issue 30 (Summer 2008).

¹³⁰ Registering modesty involved a deliberate process of Islamic reform, the subjects of Chapters One, Two, and Three of this dissertation.

subject to obligatory modifications so that they complied with the clerical leadership's categorical ban of any forms of nudity and "erotic" art.¹³¹

The transformation process in which monuments are subject to reform is similar to the destruction and subsequent metamorphosis of red-light district *Shahr-e No* into a family-themed park. Those landmarks of public art that were spared from being vandalized were offered a second chance at public exhibition, provided they underwent the process of modesty reform. In such instances, officials attempted to redesign pieces that adhered to the Supreme Council's articulation of an Islamically sanctioned visual and bodily aesthetics. The implicit understanding was that the public's gaze must be shielded from any suggestion or expression of female sexuality.

The state's tendency, via its public policy and morality campaigns, has designated the human body (and its representations) as something shameful. The emphasis of certain body parts as taboo, in particular those belonging to women, has undoubtedly led to three outcomes: certain bodies go into hiding; they become absent; or they resort to a kind of mutilation. As stated by Mehri Honarbin-Holliday, the female body, in particular, is used as "the state's instrument in order to dictate cultural behaviors."¹³² It became the overt expression by which an Islamist state would commence its *paksazi* or cleansing process. This means that the moral jurisdiction of the state designates which bodies are clean, pious, favorable, and worth memorializing. This also means that whatever potency the state possesses can be administered through vast manipulations and erasures of the public

¹³¹ Mehri Honarbin-Holliday, "Autonomous Minds and Bodies in Theory and Practice: Women Constructing Cultural Identities and Becoming Visible through Art," in *Women, Power and Politics in 21st Century Iran*, eds. Tara Povey and Elaheh Rostami-Povey, pp. 53-72 (London: Ashgate Publishing, Ltd., 2012), p. 56.

¹³² Honarbin-Holliday, p. 56.

(social) memory, the public (social) body and the private (physical) body. Thus “bodies,” in their many states of representation, compliance, and resistance, can be physically and publicly forgotten through legal and extra-legal policies, structures, development, destruction, and, moreover, compulsory forgetting.

Indeed, one cannot walk the streets of Tehran without sensing and realizing the importance of bodies —their manipulations, their troubles, their politicization, their projected martyrdom, and their socialization. In Tehran’s public spaces, there is always *something to see* —an object or person on which to gaze, evoking a mixture of bemusement, affirmation, vindication, and confusion. Billboards of martyred men and painted slogans of the Islamic Revolution on walls throughout the city hang above Iranians, young and old, sporting dramatic styles and weaving through traffic. Here, Tehran bears witness to how living and non-living bodies are constituted, re-constituted, projected, and denied expression as the regime pursues its ideological project to transform this capital into an “Islamic city.”¹³³ Yet this title has had little impact on this city of “paradox.”¹³⁴ For the diverse inhabitants who traverse and maneuver through it daily, it is a home and theater to a widely contradictory Islamist ideology that has become intimate with secular, consumerist, technological, sexual, and global forces.¹³⁵

For the fifth and final chapter, I devote to the experiential side of bodily technologies from the perspectives of Iranian women living with HIV. Through their

¹³³ Bayat, “Tehran: Paradox City,” *New Left Review* 66 (Nov./Dec. 2010): p. 114.

¹³⁴ Ibid.

¹³⁵ Bayat comments, “More dramatically, it still retains the structural and architectural palimpsest of the Shah’s time, but this is overlaid with a veneer of post-revolutionary ideology, some significant redevelopment and the footprints of globalization. More dramatically, it has been transformed from below by population growth, immigration and informal development.” Ibid., p. 120.

accounts, one learns about the individual internationalizations of and struggles with positive ideals of health, sexuality, marriage, and modesty.

CHAPTER FIVE

HIV/AIDS and the Problem of “Taboos” Talking

Bit by bit, bodies become relational, territorialized in specific ways. Indeed, places themselves might be said to be exactly the same: they, too, are made-up out of relationships between, within and beyond them; territorialized through scales, borders, geography, geopolitics. Bodies and places, then, are made-up through the production of their spatial registers, through relations of power. Bodies and places are woven together through intricate webs of social and spatial relations that are made by, and make, embodied subjects —Heidi Nast and Steve Pile¹

Introduction

In the previous four chapters, I discussed specific sites by which bodily technologies are employed to structure and reinforce ideals of family, marriage, modesty, citizenship, and becoming “modern” since the late Pahlavi period until present-day Iran. In this chapter, the discussion segues into the topic of health —specifically, how striving for and maintaining a “healthy body” are important in structuring identity, personhood, purpose, and social status; the quest for health can guide living habits, shape life goals, values, and ethical foundations, and influence decision-making for oneself and family members. For many Iranians, health is both a regime and an ideal, often cast within spiritual and religious frameworks, to achieve a wide range of objectives: from bodily-spiritual balance to social acceptance, from self-monitoring and control to honoring family traditions.

For people living with HIV/AIDS,² maintaining a healthy body often involves the negotiation of religious, economic, social, political, and cultural factors —a combination

¹ Heidi J. Nast and Steve Pile, “Introduction: MakingPlacesBodies,” *Places Through the Body* (London: Routledge, 1998), p. 3.

² Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV) is a virus that attacks the body’s immune system, complicating the body’s defense against diseases and illnesses. There is currently no cure for HIV, however HIV

that is constantly in flux and whose outcomes are often out of their control. When a person is HIV-positive, there are immediate assumptions about his or her lifestyle, education, religious conviction, drug usage, and economic status. For Robert Crawford, a scholar who studies the cultural stigmas associated with AIDS/HIV in the American context, “At the heart of the cultural politics of AIDS is a contestation over the meaning of the self. It is a politics about identity and difference, about the boundaries of personhood which distinguish legitimate from non-legitimate identities, and about the meanings upon which identities are constructed, managed, and reworked.”³ This assessment resonates with the cultural politics of HIV/AIDS in the Iranian context. Crawford states that HIV/AIDS is a boundary marker, differentiating the “unhealthy” from the “healthy.” It is an illness associated with many presumptions about “deviant” sexuality and excessive sexual behaviors.⁴

In Iran, many interrelated political and religious factors complicate government and advocacy groups’ efforts to tackle HIV—an illness that, since 1996, has been characterized as a public health crisis. As in many societies around the globe, misinformation and ignorance of the virus’s basic facts, such as modes of transmission, have jeopardized efforts to rally government and public support to raise awareness about

treatment assists in people living healthy, active lives. Late diagnoses of the virus mean that treatment may be less effective in preventing AIDS. HIV is transmitted through infected blood, semen, vaginal fluids or breast milk. The most common ways for transmission are: unprotected sex with someone living with HIV; sharing infected needles; and from an HIV-positive mother to her child during pregnancy, childbirth, or breastfeeding. For more information about HIV/AIDS, see Randy Shilts, *And the Band Played On: Politics, People, and the AIDS Epidemic* (New York: Macmillan, 2007); Tony Barnett and Alan Whiteside, *AIDS in the Twenty-First Century: Disease and Globalization* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002).

³ Robert Crawford, “The Boundaries of the Self and the Unhealthy Other: Reflections on Health, Culture and AIDS,” *Social Science & Medicine* 38, no. 10. (1994): p. 1347.

⁴ Crawford, “The Boundaries of the Self and the Unhealthy Other: Reflections on Health, Culture and AIDS,” p. 1355.

the disease and improve access to medical care. Patients often feel shame and fear familial abandonment; these pressures are compounded by their stigmatization, the threat of violence, unemployment, and financial destitution.⁵ These myriad demands have encouraged a culture of secrecy and anonymity for many Iranians living with HIV.⁶ For the majority of Iranian women living with the virus, having HIV complicates and often determines their social status, their maternal capabilities, and the social services available to them — be they from the government or medical professionals. For HIV-positive women in Iran, their social stigmatization is exacerbated by three important variables: first, their health status is considered taboo; second, the changes in government administration have effects on the length and extent of their care; and third —perhaps the most crucial— the importance of their plight and HIV as a matter of public health are questioned.

Inspired by the ethnographic contributions of Shahla Haeri, Mehri Honarbin-Holliday, Roxanne Varzi, Shirin Saiedi, Ziba Mir-Hosseini, and Azam Torab in the fields of Iranian and Women's studies, this chapter endeavors to highlight HIV-positive

⁵ See Ali Mohammadpour et al., "Coming to Terms with a Diagnosis of HIV in Iran: A Phenomenological Study," *Journal of the Association of Nurses in AIDS Care* 20, no. 4 (Jul./Aug. 2009): p. 252.

⁶ For a study on societal attitudes in Egypt, see I.A. Kabbash, et al., "Needs Assessment and Coping Strategies of Persons Infected with HIV in Egypt," *Eastern Mediterranean Health Journal* 14, no. 6 (2008): pp. 1-13. On attitudes in Thailand, see P. Liamputtong, N. Haritavorn, and N. Kiatgying-Angsulee, "HIV and AIDS, Stigma and AIDS Support Groups: Perspectives from Women Living with HIV and AIDS in Central Thailand," *Social Science & Medicine* 69 (2009): pp. 862-868. On attitudes in Yemen, see A.W. al-Serouri, et al., "AIDS Awareness and Attitudes among Yemeni Young People Living in High-Risk Areas," *Eastern Mediterranean Health Journal* 16, no. 3 (2010): pp. 242-250. On personal narratives of AIDS in Africa, see Stephanie Nolen, *28 Stories of AIDS in Africa* (Toronto: Vintage Canada, 2008). On attitudes among English-speaking US adults, see Gregory Herek, Keith Widaman, and John Capitanio, "When Sex Equals AIDS: Symbolic Stigma and Heterosexual Adults' Inaccurate Beliefs about Sexual Transmission of AIDS," *Social Problems* 52, no. 1 (2005): pp. 15-37. On public attitudes and knowledge in the United Kingdom, see National AIDS Trust Press Release, February 2011, accessed April 20, 2012, [http://www.nat.org.uk/News-and-Media/Press Releases/2011/February/MORI%20survey%20-%20knowledge%20and%20attitudes%20to%20HIV.aspx](http://www.nat.org.uk/News-and-Media/Press%20Releases/2011/February/MORI%20survey%20-%20knowledge%20and%20attitudes%20to%20HIV.aspx).

women's reflections on their lived experiences with the disease, taking into account the physical, political, and historical factors that help shape their perceptions and experiences.⁷ By "lived experience," I refer to how "people become social entities and how they attend to one another and the products of human endeavor in the course of day-to-day life."⁸ In this case, I investigate how HIV-positive women in Iran contend with the many social, legal, economic and political complications related to their health status. In other words, how do they attempt to navigate and even break down a social taboo when they are largely perceived to be the physical manifestations and carriers of that very taboo? Do they attempt to dodge their health status and condition in order to survive?

Thus far, this dissertation has examined various sites in which patriarchal and heteronormative understandings of women and female sexuality determine social policy, visual reform, spatial contexts, and the dominant historical narratives of the revolutionary period. In each chapter, I have discussed intersections of gender, politics, sexuality, and consumerism as they relate to regulatory methods used to discipline sexuality—be these modes conceptual or physical—by analyzing media images of the "modern" and "revolutionary Islamic" woman; by investigating the modification of female monuments in public settings; and by looking at the historical processes of regulating prostitution and disciplining prostitutes since the 1979 Revolution.

⁷ See Haeri, *Law of Desire*; Ziba Mir-Hosseini, *Islam and Gender: The Religious Debate in Contemporary Iran* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999); Mehri Honarbin-Holliday, *Becoming Visible in Iran* (London: Tauris Academic Studies, 2008); Roxanne Varzi, *Warring Souls: Youth, Media, and Martyrdom in Post-Revolution Iran* (Duke University Press, 2006); Azam Torab, *Performing Islam: Gender and Ritual in Iran* (London: Brill Academic Publishing, 2006); Shirin Saiedi, "Hero of Her Own Story: Gender and State Formation in Contemporary Iran" (PhD diss., Cambridge University, 2011).

⁸ Prus, *Symbolic Interaction and Ethnographic Research: Intersubjectivity and the Study of Human Lived Experience*, p. 2.

This final chapter is devoted to the experiential side of bodily technologies. It focuses on the integration of positive ideals about health, sexuality, family, marriage, and modesty from the individual accounts and experiences of Iranian women living with HIV. I ask the following questions: how do women from this marginalized community experience, confront, conceive, and speak about these ideals given their HIV-positive status and the stigmas associated with the disease? More so, how do these personal accounts speak to the individual ways in which HIV-positive women “live through” the world of HIV/AIDS in the Islamic Republic of Iran? To tackle these questions, I set aside state and religious narratives about HIV/AIDS and interviewed women who knew firsthand about living with this disease. For they are acutely aware of the complexities of their stigmatization, experiencing varying moments of inclusion and exclusion in social, family, and community gatherings. They also realize that their health status has become politicized, especially when government officials and members of the clerical authority withdraw their emotional and financial support, or when government efforts to raise public awareness about the disease cease.

The ethnographic material is based on interviews I conducted with women in Iran, during two research trips: the first from March 2010 to September 2010, and the second from May 2011 until October 2011. In total, I completed 81 face-to-face qualitative interviews, with women ranging in age from eighteen to eighty-five years old. However the interviews highlighted in this chapter include a small sample of four women whom I met at a nonprofit, health advocacy center in Tehran. On average, I spent six to seven hours each week at this center, attending group sessions with nine HIV-positive women

before conducting any interviews. The ethnographic part of this chapter is a testament to the depth of our personal interactions and discussions.⁹

This chapter contributes both diversity and nuance to the rather small ethnographic body of literature on Iranian women dealing with politicized health issues, such as HIV-AIDS. I include this valuable ethnographic material not only because it provides useful information on diverse interpretations of sexuality and sexual practices, but also because it illustrates the very complex construction of and experiences with social custom, identity, personhood, and power in contemporary Iran. According to their accounts, living with HIV necessarily involves piloting a matrix of conflicting customs, practices, and beliefs. Despite many challenges, these women navigate (and even break down) the numerous social taboos, discrimination, and stigmas they confront in their daily lives. They offer opinions on how having a “healthy body” uniquely matters to them —especially when encountering new questions about their mortality or the strength of their support networks.

Through their accounts, one learns about the individual internationalizations of, and struggles with, positive ideals of health, sexuality, marriage, and modesty that are often promoted by government officials and local clerics. In our discussions, several women invoked these ideals in unique and ordinary ways to help formulate their own opinions about motherhood, sexual identity, femininity, fashion, and being modest. In

⁹ Only 9 of the 81 interview participants are HIV-positive, to the best of my knowledge. I chose to highlight four women’s interviews due to space and time constraints. As in any project wherein the material accumulated and the information sought produces infinite routes for analysis as well as many areas for concentration, this particular chapter underwent several requisite incisions and interventions. With great hesitation, I excluded from this discussion the majority of interviews I conducted by virtue of the fact that both the volume and wealth of resources over-extended the range and scope of this chapter. Future projects will likely engage in the remaining content and dimensions of these discussions, however at the present moment, considerations of space and time determined how I would navigate this rich material.

many respects, the forthcoming opinions and intimate details shared by this particular group demonstrate an open defiance to the clerical authorities' reticence on the subject of the impact of HIV/AIDS in Iranian society. Many of the women revealed how they reject their marginalization, as well as the assumptions that they were sexually irresponsible or participated in other high-risk behaviors. Moreover, when revealing how they contracted HIV, the actual conditions and circumstances under which they contracted HIV become apparent. As I discuss later in this chapter, this means that their accounts often contradict government assessments of not only the number of communities being impacted by the disease, but also the circumstances in which this type of infection occurs.

Chapter Breakdown: Historical Analysis and Ethnographic Study

Before I delve into the ethnographic section of this chapter, I will first explain aspects of the intermixing social, political, legal, religious, and economic factors that contribute to the difficulties this particular group of women faces. These topics are each addressed in this chapter's Part I, entitled "Contextualizing HIV/AIDS in the Islamic Republic of Iran." Here, I present an overview of some of the social and political challenges of HIV/AIDS in Iran; each of the following variables is mutually important in the construction of state and religious discourses on HIV/AIDS. First, I navigate through the state's HIV/AIDS discourse, highlighting government policies on HIV/AIDS. I look at the discrepancies in official and nonofficial statistics and analysis, detailing ministry health agencies and non-governmental HIV/AIDS organizations' attempts to reduce the rising rates of infection. Second, I discuss how the state's handling of HIV/AIDS through media and state agencies has led to the sustaining of HIV as a taboo disease. Third, I

examine the dissemination of misinformation about HIV and how this generates feelings of paranoia and shame for those living with the virus. After this section, I examine individual ulama opinions about the disease.

As I navigate through this matrix, I underline several themes in this discourse: one, that being HIV-positive is a social taboo; two: that state and religious discourses treat and describe people living with HIV as “vulnerable;” and three: that government health reports exacerbate the HIV/AIDS epidemic by misleading and stigmatizing. In analyzing HIV/AIDS infection statistics, I had to consider the consequences that presenting real statistics about a controversial subject like HIV/AIDS would have on public morality, state competency, and sexual practice —three areas which test the Iranian government’s *khat-e ghermez* (red lines).¹⁰

¹⁰ See Kar, *Crossing the Red Line*. The reformist-leaning media coined the term “red line” during Iranian President Khatami’s tenure starting in 1997. The phrase expressed social and political boundaries demarcated by the government for citizens not to cross. “Red lines” include limits to freedom of the press and expression, restraining journalists and opposition candidates from speaking freely about government policy in public forums. Often these red lines are not explicit and journalists only discover they have crossed the red line when they are arrested or their news publication suddenly closed. The term “red line” has more recently been used in negotiations between Iran and its right to nuclear energy development program.

The government’s sensitivity in acknowledging any rise in sexually transmitted disease cases is believed to be a substantial motivation behind the June 2007 arrest of Iranian brothers known for their HIV research and advocacy, physicians Kamiar and Arash Alaei. The Alaeis organized workshops to raise HIV/AIDS public awareness, reduce social stigma, and educate others on high-risk behavior. After their arrest, health advocates accused government officials of attempting to stultify and thus silence efforts to research and discuss HIV/AIDS research in public forums, domestic and international. Even though both brothers had participated in launching a prison needle exchange program and a condom distribution program in health clinics across Iran, the two were arrested in June 2007 and charged and convicted in January 2009 with violating Article 508 of Islamic Republic of Iran Penal Code. In October 2010 and August 2011, Kamiar and Arash were released, respectively. However their plight and subsequent imprisonment have discouraged other health advocates to publicize their efforts to reduce HIV/AIDS numbers in settings not approved by Iranian authorities. For more information about the Alaei brothers’ case, see Paul Grondahl, “Doctor Released from Iranian Prison,” *Times Union*, June 13, 2011, accessed March 20, 2012. <http://www.timesunion.com/local/article/Doctor-released-from-Iranian-prison-I-struggle-1420477.php#ixzz1PXaIeC00>. Their imprisonment marked a new direction for the government, who had previously provided financial support for the Alaei brothers’ efforts to tackle the problem of intravenous drug use in clinics across Iran. However, the Alaeis’ attendance of international AIDS conferences drew government ire. After a one-day closed trial hearing, both men were convicted of aiding in velvet revolutions to overturn the regime; authorities presented evidence that the brothers had met with foreign

In Part II, entitled “Reformulating the Taboo of ‘Vulnerable’ Women and HIV/AIDS,” I move from state and religious discourses on HIV/AIDS to the experiential domain of the disease. Aside from the government’s reasoning that HIV transmission in Iran is the result of “high-risk” behaviour —the most common method being dirty needles from intravenous drug use— this research shows that a unique combination of factors have led to higher transmission rates among Iranian women. Moreover, government data on the demographic of HIV-positive women does not adequately describe the conditions and circumstances with which infections occur.

By “reformulating the taboo of HIV,” I ask how Iranian women engage with a regime of societal expectations that dictate motherhood roles, construct particular desires, determine partnership arrangements and even shape health ideals. I consult their personal narratives, looking at how their opinions and ideals contend with and compare to ideals about health, femininity, and sexuality that are cast in Islamist phrasing and packaging. In our interviews, I ask them to comment on global forces, such as consumerism, media, and fashion. We also engage in discussion about maternity, through the controversial and highly sensitive issue of a HIV-positive mother breastfeeding her children.

These interviews illuminate how some Iranian women contend with a maze of life-and-death issues related to their health status. In many of these interviews, women comment on being active members of nuclear and extended families. They describe striving for societal acceptance, seeking to be treated fairly, and having access to health and employment services. A point worth emphasizing is that many of these women had refrained from “high-risk” behavior the moment they became infected; for some of the

health advocates and officials while attending workshops and conferences abroad. In an interview with an American university newspaper, Dr. Kamiar Alaei remarked, "I visited many prisons as a doctor to help the prisoners and now I was a prisoner myself. It made no sense."

interviewees, the sources of their infections were claimed to be their philandering and/or drug addicted husbands and *sigheh* partners.

To commence, I survey the historical and discursive trajectory of HIV/AIDS policy and awareness in the Islamic Republic of Iran.

Part I: Contextualizing HIV/AIDS in the Islamic Republic of Iran

Iranian State Discourse on HIV/AIDS

Sources provide varying accounts of the first documented case of HIV in Iran. The first case appeared as a result of a contaminated blood during a blood transfusion sometime between 1985 and 1987.¹¹ Thereafter, consecutive waves of HIV infections hit different demographic populations at different times, across Iran. The first wave, ending in the mid-1990s, was marked by infections among hemophilia patients who received tainted blood transfusions.¹² (According to the Ministry of Health and Medical Education¹³ (MOHME) 2010 report, until 1995 less than ten new cases of HIV were identified annually).¹⁴

The Iranian government began charting demographic shifts in the general public's sexual behaviors almost ten years after it realized that rates among "high-risk" groups¹⁵—in official health reports, identified as primarily intravenous drug users (IDUs) and prisoners—were reaching epidemic levels.¹⁶ An incident marking the

¹¹ In Iran's HIV/AIDS reports to UND, the first cases of HIV were documented in 1985. See UNDP Iran, "The Prevention and Control of HIV/AIDS in Iran," February 27, 2011, accessed April 12, 2012, <http://www.undp.org.ir/index.php/project-highlights/481-27-february-2011-the-prevention-and-control-of-hiv-aids-in-iran>. Researcher Pardis Mahdavi states that HIV was first detected in 1986. See Pardis Mahdavi, "Who Will Catch Me if I Fall? Health and the Infrastructure of Risk for Urban Young Iranians," in *Contemporary Iran: Economy, Society and Politics*, ed. Ali Gheissari (Oxford: Oxford University Press, Inc., 2009), p. 157. Journal *Zanan* claims the first detected case was reported in 1987 caused by contaminated blood during a transfusion. See "Zanan va AIDS dar Iran: Az Enkar ta Paziresh/ Women and AIDS in Iran: From Denial to Acceptance," *Zanan* 135 (Sharivar 1385/September 2006): pp. 50-55.

¹² "The Prevention and Control of HIV/AIDS in Iran," UNDP Iran, February 27, 2011.

¹³ For more information about the organization and its operations in the provinces see Ramin Mehrdad, "Health System in Iran," *Japan Medical Association Journal* 52, no. 1 (2009): pp. 69-73.

¹⁴ *Monitoring of the United Nations General Assembly Special Session on HIV and AIDS*, National AIDS Committee Secretariat, Iran Ministry of Health and Medical Education, February 2010, p. 14.

¹⁵ In the many medical publications I reviewed for this chapter, I noticed that in Iran's official reports of its domestic HIV/AIDS epidemic, the same list of characters (also known as sub-populations participating in

“second wave” of HIV in the mid-1990s necessitated an immediate change in public health attention and strategy. Two hundred fifty prisoners from the Kermanshah-Khanuj prison tested positive for HIV.¹⁷ The reported occurrences of needle sharing among inmates presented a potentially dangerous public health scenario if prisoners were released undiagnosed. As a result, health officials began implementing practical strategies for treatment and prevention.

At the time, the epidemic was regarded as “concentrated” in the sub-population of IDUs from state penitentiaries.¹⁸ To curb the soaring numbers of infections among IDUs,

high-risk behaviors) are mentioned as participating in unhealthy, high-risk activities; and thus by this kind of categorization, government resources are allocated to specific groups for treatment, prevention, and study. This group historically included female sex workers, inmates, intravenous drug addicts, and men who have sex with men; in the past decade (between 2001 to 2008), studies surveyed truck drivers, sailors, and pregnant women.

¹⁶ The term “IDU” stands for “intravenous drug user” or “injected drug user.” According to a UNAIDS 2002 report, most HIV transmission in the country occurred among its estimated 200,000–300,000 IDUs, of which sixty-five percent of the known and reported HIV cases in Iran were IDU-attributed. Figures first reported in 2002 by Iran’s Ministry of Health and published in Ali Rowhani Rahbar, et al., “Prevalence of HIV Infection and Other Blood-borne Infections in Incarcerated and Non-incarcerated Injection Drug Users (IDUs) in Mashhad, Iran,” *International Journal of Drug Policy* 15 (2004): p. 151.

Studies find that Iranian drug users seeking treatment use opium and heroin. (Opium usage has significantly decreased but injection of a form of methamphetamine is on the rise.) However very little is known about the characteristics and risk profiles of Iran’s IDUs. A 2006 study attempted to describe the correlation between harm reduction needs of IDUs and others at a high risk of HIV infection. See Emran Razzaghi, Afarin Rahimia Movaghar, Traci Craig Green, and Kaveh Khoshnood, “Profiles of Risk: A Qualitative Study of Injecting Drug Users in Tehran, Iran,” *Harm Reduction Journal* 3, no. 12 (March 18, 2006): p. 2. Another 2006 study conducted on patterns of drug use among IDUs found that specific information on IDUs in Iran —such as their high-risk behavior— is insufficient and as such, has yet to lead to the creation of specific health promotion and intervention strategies specific to these populations. Additionally, researchers find that the specific data on IDU, such as help seeking and blood-borne virus risk behaviour is insufficient to allow such tailoring of health promotion and intervention strategies. They also question if government agencies can adequately facilitate the monitoring of risk-factor trends over time. See Carolyn Day, Bijan Nassirimanesh, Anthony Shakeshaft, and Kate Dolan, “Patterns of Drug Use among a Sample of Drug Users and Injecting Drug Users Attending a General Practice in Iran,” *Harm Reduction Journal* 3, no. 1 (2006): p. 2.

¹⁷ Janne Bjerre Christensen, *Drugs, Deviancy, and Democracy in Iran: The Interaction of State and Civil Society* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), p. 134.

¹⁸ Fallahi et al., “Stigma, Discrimination, and the Consequences of HIV-AIDS for People Living With It in Iran,” *Life Science Journal* 8, no. 4 (2011): p. 503. Because of the high infection rates reported among the incarcerated, the MOHME and non-governmental health agencies concentrated on controlling sexually transmitted infections (STI) in prisons. A 2002 voluntary study conducted in a local prison in Iran’s Fars province reported that “30% and 78% prevalence rates of HIV and hepatitis C virus (HCV) infection

clerics, public health advocates, and government officials encouraged a more “typology-suggested intervention.”¹⁹ Subsequently needle-exchange, methadone maintenance, outreach programs, and harm reduction therapies were introduced and strategically implemented for an incarcerated demographic that was, in many respects, physically quarantined in prison.²⁰ Even prisoners’ families were provided complimentary medical care.²¹

With these reforms, official perceptions of HIV-infected drug addicts began to be transformed. Public health workers lobbied clerics, judges, and government officials to treat drug addition as an illness and humanitarian issue. Judges began ordering rehabilitation for treating substance abuse instead of jail-time.²² If convicted drug users

among incarcerated drug users, respectively.” See Bijan Nassirimanesh, “Proceedings of the Abstract for the Fourth National Harm Reduction Conference,” Harm Reduction Coalition, Seattle (2002). Of the population sampled, shared needles and razors, along with used needles and unhygienic conditions for tattooing, were reported to be common conduits of disease transmission.

¹⁹ Razzaghi, et al., “Profiles of Risk: A Qualitative Study of Injecting Drug Users in Tehran, Iran,” *Harm Reduction Journal* 3, no. 12 (March 18, 2006), doi: 10.1186/1477-7517-3-12. The needle exchange program was established in the late 1990s, at the time distinguishing Iran as the only country in the Middle East and North Africa to offer needle exchange services in some of its prisons. As of September 2011, the needle exchange program was ongoing and UNAIDS reported 679 sites for needle exchange compared to 21 sites in Afghanistan. See *Middle East and North Africa Regional Report on AIDS 2011*, UNAIDS, p. 21, accessed March 5, 2012, http://www.unaids.org/en/media/unaids/contentassets/documents/unaidspublication/2011/JC2257_UNAIDS-MENA-report-2011_en.pdf.

In a one-year period, 6,022,834 free needles and syringes were distributed. On average, between 26 to 35 needles and syringes are distributed per IDU per year. See *Islamic Republic of Iran: Monitoring of the United Nations General Assembly Special Session on HIV and AIDS Report*, National AIDS Committee Secretariat, Iran Ministry of Health and Medical Education, March 2012, p. 25.

²⁰ See Emran Razzaghi, et al., “Profiles of Risk: A Qualitative Study of Injecting Drug Users in Tehran, Iran,” pp. 1-13.

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 11. Prisoners and their families were informed about HIV risks and given condoms; in certain prisons, pilot programs administering clean syringes were offered to IDUs. Prisoners’ wives, who became directly infected through conjugal visits with incarcerated IDUs and/or contaminated blood contact, also received some information and training about the disease.

²² Christensen, pp. 135-136. Article 1 of Iran’s Anti-Narcotics Law, as amended in 1997, punishes anyone “using drugs in any form or manner except for cases provided for by law.” Article 2 specifies the punishments for each offense, taking into account the defendant’s criminal record. Depending on the

went through rehabilitation programs, their sentences would be reduced or dropped altogether.²³ This shift in policy represented a radical approach to state-level methods of discipline and punishment,²⁴ which treated drug addictions and HIV/AIDS as signs of moral depravity and corruption.²⁵ Public health reforms began to treat people with drug addictions as “vulnerable” patients, in need of comprehensive public health guidance and support.²⁶

Once major reforms in the nation’s penitentiary treatment programs were also implemented in the general public, HIV/AIDS policies changed nationwide. These measures ran parallel to the liberalizing reforms of Iran’s fifth president, Mohammad Khatami. By 2001, MOHME and participating agencies had created a National Strategic Plan, concentrating on “age appropriate information and education, voluntary counseling and testing, harm reduction, HIV/STI care and treatment and strengthened HIV related

number of kilograms found in his/her possession, for the first offence, fines and lashes are administered; by the fourth offense, the death penalty is administered. Article 42 notes that judiciary power is permitted to request that drug-related convicts attend special detoxification camps to aid in rehabilitation rather than prisons. See “The Anti-Narcotics Law of the Islamic Republic of Iran,” November 8, 1997, accessed April 25, 2012, <http://www.unhcr.org/refworld/docid/4c35b0a52.html>.

It was reported that in January 2005, justice minister Ayatollah Mohammad Esma’il Shoushtari instructed prosecutors to ignore punitive judicial laws germane to drug offences and defer to health ministry officials on treating drug-addicted convicts. See Amir Arsalan Afkhami, “From Punishment to Harm Reduction: Resecularization of Addiction in Contemporary Iran,” in *Contemporary Iran: Economy, Society, Politics*, ed. Ali Gheissari (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), p. 207; Karl Vick, “AIDS Crisis Brings Radical Change in Iran’s Response to Heroin Use,” *Washington Post*, July 5, 2005.

²³ Ibid., p. 135.

²⁴ For an extensive discussion of modern day techniques employed by western penal systems, which elaborate disciplinary power structures, see Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (New York: Vintage Books, 1995).

²⁵ Afkhami, “From Punishment to Harm Reduction: Resecularization of Addiction in Contemporary Iran,” p. 200. In capital criminal cases, drug addicts were also charged with *mohareb ba khoda* (at war with God).

²⁶ Christensen, p. 135. See also Afkhami, “From Punishment to Harm Reduction: Resecularization of Addiction in Contemporary Iran,” p. 200.

applied studies.”²⁷ Two years later, the clerical leadership and government institutions began to accept the possibility of a rising HIV rate, which led to expansions in university-approved research studies on the epidemic and more programs to reach members of the general public affected by the disease.²⁸ In August 2006, localized support centers, known as *Bashgah-e Yaraneh-e Mosbat* (Positive Clubs), were set up for HIV-positive patients, focusing on HIV harm reduction and creating local strategies for the problems of stigma and discrimination.²⁹

Iran’s various ministries also pledged to assist in maintaining infection rates at less than 0.1 percent among the general population and below 25 percent among high-risk groups by the end of 2010.³⁰ Triangular clinics were established to incorporate accessible services such HIV/AIDS treatment and care (including treatment with antiretrovirals);³¹

²⁷ Dr. Mohammad Hossein Nikman, “United Nations High-level Meeting on HIV/AIDS Statement,” (statement to United Nations from Acting Health Minister of the Islamic Republic of Iran, June 8-10, 2011, New York), accessed April 12, 2012, <http://www.un.org/en/ga/aidsmeeting2011/pdf/iran.pdf>. There is also a 30-member National AIDS Committee which assists in coordination and management of the AIDS Plan that the Ministry of Health attests has an “active participation and administration of the government.” See *Islamic Republic of Iran Progress Report: Monitoring of the United Nations General Assembly Special Session on HIV and AIDS*, National AIDS Committee Secretariat, Ministry of Health and Medical Education, March 2012, p. 54, accessed April 12, 2012, http://www.unaids.org/en/dataanalysis/monitoringcountryprogress/progressreports/2012countries/ce_IR_Narrative_Report.pdf.

²⁸ See Mahdavi, p. 158.

²⁹ Positive Clubs are affiliated with *Tanzim-e Khanevadeh-ye Jomhuri-ye Islami* (Family Planning Association of the Islamic Republic of Iran).

³⁰ See “The Prevention and Control of HIV/AIDS in Iran,” UNDP Iran, February 27, 2011, accessed April 12, 2012, <http://www.undp.org.ir/index.php/hivaids-tb-malaria/481-27-february-2011-the-prevention-and-control-of-hivaids-in-iran/>.

³¹ Standard HIV/AIDS treatment is Antiretroviral Therapy (ART), which was introduced internationally in 1996. See World Health Organization, *Antiretroviral Therapy for HIV Infection in Adults and Adolescents: Recommendations for Public Health Approach 2010 Revision* (Geneva: WHO, 2010). In Iran, the estimated number of people eligible for antiretroviral therapy is 26,000—compared to 22,000 in Pakistan, 25,000 in Somalia, and 93,000 in Sudan. See *UNAIDS Middle East and North Africa Regional Report on AIDS 2011*, pp. 52-53.

voluntary and confidential testing; and information on HIV/AIDS, STD, and drug dependence.³² (However in the provinces' urban centers of Esfahan, Shiraz, and Mashad, testing centers were less available).³³ Iran's HIV/AIDS and public health experts also began presenting their findings and prevention methods at international research and NGO conferences; they showcased innovative HIV/AIDS prevention and care programs, such as methadone maintenance treatment and triangular clinics operating in Iran.³⁴ (Many of these researchers were university-funded and affiliated with Iran's Center for AIDS Research.)³⁵ Also at these conferences, Iranian researchers collaborated and shared

³² Other services included the following: information, education, assessment, family and group counseling; methadone maintenance, and the provision of sterile needles and syringes and condoms. See Rahbar, "Prevalence of HIV Infection and Other Bloodborne Infections in Incarcerated and Non-incarcerated Injection Drug Users (IDUs) in Mashhad, Iran," p. 152. "Triangular clinics" were established as part of a comprehensive nationwide policy to provide prevention and treatment. The first triangular clinic was established in Kermanshah's central prison in October 2000. It demonstrated that by "grouping the three service areas together, it was possible to deliver a responsive, comprehensive and integrated service to drug users, their local community and people living with HIV, including drug users and their families." See *UNAIDS Middle East and North Africa Regional Report on AIDS 2011*, p. 31.

³³ Clinics such as ones established in Mashad by the Central Prison of Mashad offered programs for HIV/AIDS, drug dependence, and sexually transmitted disease (STD). See Rowhani Rahbar, et al., "Prevalence of HIV Infection and Other Blood-borne Infections in Incarcerated and Non-incarcerated Injection Drug Users (IDUs) in Mashhad, Iran," p. 152. The government even augmented its spending in the fight against rising HIV/AIDS infections. For 2004-2005, they pledged about \$US 14 million. By March 2009, it spent 309,174,961 thousands *rials* (\$US 38 million) for HIV/AIDS control programs, accounting to a 16.2 % increase in spending, according to the MOHME. Financial commitments were pledged for "all members of the general population, especially high-risk groups and prisoners." According to the MOHME's 2012 monitoring reports prepared for UNAIDS, the "allocation of funds, sex, age, ethnic and religious background and profession have not been a factor." See *Monitoring of the United Nations General Assembly Special Session on HIV and AIDS, National AIDS Committee Secretariat*, Iran Ministry of Health and Medical Education, p. 22; "The Prevention and Control of HIV/AIDS in I.R. Iran, Phases 1 & 2," UNDP Iran, 2011, accessed April 30, 2012, <http://www.undp.org.ir/index.php/component/content/article/403>. Ongoing, joint Iran and UNDP efforts pledged almost \$15.9 million dollars in a two-phase education project designed to control HIV prevalence and incidence.

³⁴ Afkhami, "From Punishment to Harm Reduction: Resecularization of Addiction in Contemporary Iran," pp. 203-204.

³⁵ Kamiar Alaie (HIV/AIDS expert and medical doctor), interview by author, telephone interview, New York, NY., June 26, 2012.

teaching and prevention strategies with HIV experts from different countries. These combined efforts between government officials, social scientists, and public health advocates were believed to be the reason behind the improvement of domestic HIV/AIDS treatment and subsequently decreasing domestic rates of HIV infections.³⁶

Government officials began speaking about HIV/AIDS as a matter of public interest and subsequently commenced a MOHME-administered media campaign to inform the general public. MOHME began releasing official, annual statistics on the reported cases of HIV/AIDS infections, via Iran's media agencies, including the Iranian Students' News Agency (ISNA), Mehr News Agency (MNA), and the Islamic Republic of Iran Broadcasting (IRIB).³⁷ State television and radio commenced mass media programs through "teaser" health campaigns.³⁸ MOHME-sponsored campaigns began

Telephone interview in New York with Kamiar Alaie (HIV/AIDS expert and medical doctor), interview with Kristin Soraya Batmanghelichi, June 26, 2012, New York.

³⁶ Afkhami, pp. 204-206.

³⁷ The Iranian media has also broadcast some programs for "the elimination of discrimination and stigma against people living with HIV/AIDS." See *Islamic Republic of Iran Country Report: Monitoring of the United Nations General Assembly Special Session on HIV and AIDS*, National AIDS Committee Secretariat, Ministry of Health and Education, February 2010, p. 33, accessed April 18, 2012, <http://www.unaids.org/fr/dataanalysis/monitoringcountryprogress/2010progressreportsubmittedbycountries/file,33662,fr.pdf>. ISNA usually publishes HIV/AIDS statistics that are accompanied interviews with Ministry of Health officials who confirm these numbers; the articles do not report any information about how the data is calculated or provide data about sexual behaviors in the general public that might attribute to rising HIV rates of infection. It is also worth mentioning that MNA is run by Islamic Ideology Dissemination Organization, headed by Seyyed Mehdi Khamoushi, which recently launched "Wikifeqh" an online information site for Islamic Religious Law. See "Wikifeqh," Islamic Ideology Dissemination Organization, accessed April 18, 2012, <http://wikifeqh.ir/wiki/index.php>. In 2006, funding allocated to media programs through IRIB was set at \$254,00.00. See "Declaration of Commitment," *Islamic Republic of Iran Country Report: Monitoring of the United Nations General Assembly Special Session on HIV and AIDS*, Office of the Under-Secretary for Health, Ministry of Health and Medical Education, Centre for Disease Management, January 2006, accessed June 1, 2012, http://data.unaids.org/pub/report/2006/2006_country_progress_report_iran_en.pdf.

³⁸ See "The Prevention and Control of HIV/AIDS in Iran," UNDP Iran, February 27, 2011.

publicizing World AIDS Day, which is celebrated annually on December 1.³⁹ Health clinics were supplied with brochures on AIDS awareness. Across Tehran, giant billboards were decorated with red ribbons—the universal symbol for HIV/AIDS advocacy—in major thoroughfares and parks.

The public health community also helped mobilize public awareness. HIV/AIDS advocates began pushing for the widening of public access to HIV/AIDS-related information by promoting prevention methods, such as condom use.⁴⁰ Health officials initially focused on reaching out to specific demographic groups to stimulate changes in knowledge, attitude, and behavior—namely, teachers; trainers; high school and university students; couples intending to permanently marry; and “high risk” populations,⁴¹ including IDUs, prisoners, and sex workers, were provided cursory

³⁹ Conflicting media sources reported that Iran had removed World AIDS Day from their state calendar. State-affiliated newspaper *Etemad* reported on March 12, 2012 that the new regulations, approved by the Supreme Council of Revolution, permitted the official state calendar to hold occasions “of importance to different layers of the nation” and that “strengthen ‘Iranian national identity.’” It was reported that the ruling was approved and signed by council chair and Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, in August 2009. This report disputes the actual events. According to Iran’s UNDP, the official holiday was celebrated at the Iranian Health Ministry in 2010, 2011, and 2012. Iran’s English-language satellite channel Press TV broadcast the short-program, “Getting to Zero,” about a Tehran-based World AIDS Day conference. See Golnaz Esfandiari, “Iran Reportedly Removes World AIDS Day from State Calendar,” *RFERL*, March 17, 2012, accessed June 4, 2012, http://www.rferl.org/content/iran_takes_world_aids_day_off_calendar/24518879.html. “Iran Marks World AIDS Day,” Press TV, November 30, 2011, accessed June 4, 2012, <http://www.presstv.ir/detail/213079.html>.

⁴⁰ Interviews in Tehran with Fatemeh Salehi (SPASDI social worker) and K. Mansourian (SPASDI director), interview by Kristin Soraya Batmanghelichi, September 21, 2011, Tehran, Iran.

⁴¹ In the many medical publications I reviewed for this thesis project on conceptualizations of women’s bodies in contemporary Iran, I noticed that in Iran’s official reports of its domestic HIV/AIDS epidemic, the same list of characters (also known as sub-populations participating in high-risk behaviors) are mentioned as participatory in unhealthy, high-risk or at-risk activities; and thus by this kind of categorization, government resources are allocated to specific groups for treatment, prevention, and study. This group has typically included female sex workers, inmates, intravenous drug addicts, and men who have sex with men; in the past decade (between 2001 to 2008), studies surveyed truck drivers, sailors, and pregnant women.

instruction about HIV prevention and care.⁴² By 2006, policy reforms for HIV/AIDS curriculum were proposed in schools and workplaces where AIDS-awareness pamphlets and handbooks were approved for distribution. Qom-based⁴³ Shi'a clerics even endorsed the booklet.⁴⁴ (A 2012 official review of this education curriculum concludes that HIV is still considered a taboo in the education system, in spite of the HIV/AIDS curriculum that commenced in 2006.⁴⁵ In one qualitative study, researchers found that “because of unreasonable fears among most Iranian people that AIDS education promotes high risk

⁴² By 2011, nearly 38 percent of registered teachers in Iran had been trained in HIV/AIDS awareness and prevention. “The Prevention and Control of HIV/AIDS,” UNDP Iran, February 27, 2011, accessed June 19, 2012.

⁴³ Qom is the largest center for Shi'a scholarship in the world.

⁴⁴ Hannah Allam, “Iran’s AIDS-Prevention Program among World’s Most Progressive,” Knight Rider, April 14, 2006. The pamphlet was mainly designed by Dr. Arash Alaei, who helped improve HIV/AIDS awareness in Kermanshah province after a government-testing program confirmed the rising rates of infections among drug addicts from its ex-convict and prisoner populations, which was subsequently found present among the wives and children of Kermanshah’s addicts. This article reports that the handbook is no longer in distribution, after the election of President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad.

⁴⁵ *Islamic Republic of Iran Progress Report: Monitoring of the United Nations General Assembly Special Session on HIV and AIDS*, March 2012, p. 34. Research studies conducted in different geographic areas across Iran and published between the years 2001 and 2011, document the current attitudes, behaviors, and knowledge about HIV/AIDS. In general, many of the studies identify discriminatory attitudes towards HIV/AIDS patients. Moreover, they report to the misconceptions about contraction, curability, and prevention that have contributed to the spread of misinformation about the illness, along with fomenting anxieties about the virus’s alleged threat to society. The reasons for this misinformation have been attributed to poor media attention to the issue; the application of certain spurious religious beliefs; the limited and inconsistent HIV/AIDS education for student populations; and the reticence of parents, teachers, physicians and nurses to discuss the issue to their respective communities. Negative attitudes of the illness are also attributed to religious beliefs. In a 2010 study on the attitudes of a selection of Shiraz high school students, researchers concluded that “loyalty to Islamic religious beliefs have an important role on attitudes towards the disease.” See Tavoosi et al., “Knowledge and Attitude towards HIV/AIDS among Iranian Students,” *BMC Public Health* 4, no. 17 (2004), doi:10.1186/1471-2458-4-17; See Mohammadi, “Reproductive Knowledge, Attitudes and Behavior among Adolescent Males in Tehran, Iran.” and CA. Yazdi, K. Aschbacher, A. Arvanta, HM Naser, A. Abdollahi, M. Mousavi, MR. Narmani, M. Kianpishe, F. Nicfallah, and AK Moghadam, “Knowledge, Attitudes and Sources of Information Regarding HIV/AIDS in Iranian Adolescents,” *AIDS Care* 18, no. 8 (November 2006): pp.1004-10; M. Movahed and S. Shooa, “On Attitude towards HIV/AIDS among Iranian Students: Case Study: High School Students in Shiraz City,” *Pakistan Journal of Biological Sciences* 13, no. 6 (Mar., 2010): p. 275.

behaviors, sex education about HIV transmission has no place in schools and universities in Iran.”)⁴⁶

Yet, even despite official campaigns to improve HIV/AIDS awareness during Khatami’s administration, other obstacles jeopardized how much access and knowledge about the virus and its prevention Iranians could obtain, given the state’s control of information output. One fundamental discrepancy lies in government estimates of the number of people in Iran living with HIV/AIDS. According to many critics, whom I showcase in the next section, this data is both misleading and inaccurate.

Who Counts? Statistical Discrepancies in HIV/AIDS Discourse

“Obtaining an estimate of the number of people infected with HIV in a country or region is important for the purpose of evaluation, programme planning and advocacy,” writes the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS) and the World Health Organization (WHO) Working Group on Global HIV/AIDS and STI Surveillance.⁴⁷ Each country employs different surveillance systems of their respective HIV epidemics, although reporting systems intend to “provide information that will increase and improve the response to the HIV epidemic.”⁴⁸ Early warning indicators of a possible epidemic can also be determined, and among concentrated demographics or sub-groups, “surveillance can provide valuable information for designing focused

⁴⁶ See Anahita Tavoosi et al., “Knowledge and Attitude towards HIV/AIDS among Iranian Students.”

⁴⁷ *Guidelines for Measuring National HIV Prevalence*, UNAIDS/WHO Working Group on Global HIV/AIDS and STI Surveillance, 2005, p. 5, accessed April 10, 2012, http://www.unaids.org/en/media/unaids/contentassets/dataimport/pub/manual/2005/20050101_gs_guidemeasuringpopulation_en.pdf

⁴⁸ *Guidelines for Measuring National HIV Prevalence*, UNAIDS/WHO, p. 5.

interventions.”⁴⁹ Iran’s MOHME concurs, qualifying that estimating the number of HIV infected cases and at-risk groups “can play a decisive role in clarifying the political orientation of prevention with respect to the size of each at-risk group, the gravity of the problem in each of the groups, the change in the conditions of the epidemic among them, and the identification of the program’s blind spots.”⁵⁰

One issue that has received little critical attention is the discrepancy between the official HIV statistics provided by the MOHME and the Center for Disease Management—two institutions that release official HIV/AIDS statistics—and the data published by international HIV/AIDS agencies and reported by Iran’s domestic health organizations and medical researchers. The discrepancy lies in the government reports on the actual versus estimated cases of Iranians who are HIV-positive. Moreover, government health officials provide different health statistics for different audiences. Compare MOHME monitoring and epidemiological reports from 2004 to 2012 reports, which it prepared for UNAIDS, WHO, and UNDP to satisfy its reporting obligations for membership in (and funding from) these agencies. According to Iran’s HIV/AIDS progress reports, HIV/AIDS statistics are much larger than reported in their domestic monitoring reports. In 2003, Iran reported an estimate figure of 31,000.⁵¹ By the end of 2005, Iran reported a

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ “Monitoring of the United Nations General Assembly Special Session on HIV and AIDS,” National AIDS Committee Secretariat, Ministry of Health and Medical Education, February 2010, p. 19, accessed April 10, 2012, <http://www.unaids.org/fr/dataanalysis/monitoringcountryprogress/2010progressreportssubmittedbycountries/file,33662,fr.pdf>.

⁵¹ See “Epidemiological Fact Sheet on HIV/AIDS and Sexually Transmitted Infections: 2004 Update for Iran,” UNAIDS/WHO, pp. 1-14, accessed April 10, 2012, http://data.unaids.org/publications/Fact-Sheets01/iran_en.pdf.

range of 60,000 to 70,000 cases of people living with HIV.⁵² In a 2008 epidemiological report for the UNAIDS/WHO Working Group on Global HIV/AIDS and STI, Iran reported an estimate of 86,000.⁵³ For 2009, in another country monitoring report, MOHME estimated 83,000.⁵⁴ In Iran's 2012 progress report for UNAIDS, health officials reported 23,497 registered cases of people living with HIV by September 2011, and 93,250 estimated for 2010. They forecast that by 2015, the figure would increase to 126,300.⁵⁵

Experts within the fields of medicine, public health and social work, as well as journalists writing on women's health or other health-related issues, are aware of this under-reporting. Public health employees, medical researchers, and HIV/AIDS advocates have responded by going on record, conducting interviews with domestic and international media outlets while pushing aside the potential backlash or the fear of losing their jobs for speaking out. Their objective is to encourage MOHME to accurately publish the number of HIV cases—which are already published in regional and international AIDS reports—for the general public. And when they were not successful in

⁵² See "Declaration of Commitment," *Islamic Republic of Iran Country Report: Monitoring of the United Nations General Assembly Special Session on HIV and AIDS*, Office of the Under-Secretary for Health, Ministry of Health and Medical Education, Centre for Disease Management, January 2006.

⁵³ "Epidemiological Fact Sheet on HIV and AIDS 2008 Update," Islamic Republic of Iran, October 2008, p. 4, accessed April 13, 2012, http://apps.who.int/globalatlas/predefinedReports/EFS2008/full/EFS2008_IR.pdf.

⁵⁴ "Monitoring of the United Nations General Assembly Special Session on HIV and AIDS," National AIDS Committee Secretariat, Ministry of Health and Medical Education, February 2010, p. 19, accessed April 3, 2012, <http://www.unaids.org/fr/dataanalysis/monitoringcountryprogress/2010progressreportsubmittedbycountries/file,33662,fr.pdf>.

⁵⁵ *Islamic Republic of Iran Progress Report: Monitoring of the United Nations General Assembly Special Session on HIV and AIDS*, p. 15.

reaching this objective, they published counter-statistics to dispute official MOHME reports. Note the following cases: in 2003, a research study from University of Tehran's Medical Sciences reported that official figures were approximately 5,000 people infected with HIV/AIDS.⁵⁶ HIV/AIDS experts disputed this figure, stating it was likely five times more.⁵⁷ Iran's Center for Disease Management stated that by late 2004, official figures were around 9,800 HIV-positive cases and 374 cases of AIDS.⁵⁸ In 2006, according to feminist journal *Zanan*, Iranian officials reported 13,357 known cases.⁵⁹ Three years later, in 2009, MOHME reported an increase in HIV cases, reporting around 20,000 cases of HIV countrywide.⁶⁰ Hossein Ali Shahyari, Acting Director of the Health Commission for the *Majles* (Parliament), disputed MOHME's data on the reported number of HIV-positive cases in 2009. As cited by *Farda News*, an online Persian-language news portal, he claimed the range was "five to seven times this number, equaling almost 100,000."⁶¹ The most recent estimate from a 2012 joint-report from the MOHME and the Center for

⁵⁶ The researchers explain, "In 2003, officially there were 5086 Iranians living with HIV/AIDS, of which, 4838 were male and 248 were female." See Anahita Tavoosi et al., "Knowledge and Attitude towards HIV/AIDS among Iranian Students," *BMC Public Health* 4, no. 17 (2004).

⁵⁷ See Golnaz Esfandiari, "Iran: Tehran Begins to Confront the 'Time Bomb' of HIV/AIDS," *RFERL*, November 10, 2003, accessed April 2, 2012, <http://www.rferl.org/content/article/1104954.html>.

⁵⁸ *HIV/AIDS in Iran (Cumulative Statistics) Tehran 2004 Report*, Iran Center for Disease Management, Office of the Deputy for Public Health, Ministry of Health and Medical Education of the I.R. Iran, 2004. In Persian.

⁵⁹ "Zanan va AIDS dar Iran: Az Enkar ta Paziresh/ Women and AIDS in Iran: From Denial to Acceptance," *Zanan*.

⁶⁰ "Amar-e Vagh'ei-ye Mobtalayan be AIDS dar Iran/Real Statistics of AIDS Cases in Iran," *Farda News*, 7 Azar 1388/November 28, 2009, accessed April 30, 2012, <http://www.fardanews.com/fa/news/96834/>.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*

Disease Management cited 23,125 known domestic cases of HIV—of which 8.5% are women and 91.5% are men.⁶²

By the MOHME's own admission, there is a wide gap between the official figure for the identified cases of HIV versus the number of estimated cases. The ministry's monitoring reports attribute this challenge to limitations of diagnostic services, which require expensive tests.⁶³ In a 2012 monitoring report, for instance, "special software" is reportedly the reason for the new and larger estimates.⁶⁴

Breaking down HIV as a Taboo: Let's (Try to) Talk about Sex and HIV/AIDS

Given the inconsistencies in HIV/AIDS figures from the MOHME reports, it is presumed that other implicit factors determine how, when, and why HIV/AIDS statistics are calculated and released for public consumption. In the previous section, I commented on the inconsistent data published in Iran's HIV/AIDS reports. There is an additional matter of importance, which is implicit in the political decision to withhold of HIV/AIDS information from the general public. Relatively few details are provided in official HIV/AIDS statistics that may assist in providing context of HIV/AIDS reported cases. In the Persian-language MOHME reports on HIV/AIDS statistics, there is no data elaborating the identities, lifestyles, and geographic locations of these cases. But would this information not help determine atypical indicators behind HIV transmission modes,

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ *Islamic Republic of Iran Progress Report: Monitoring of the United Nations General Assembly Special Session on HIV and AIDS*, National AIDS Committee Secretariat, Ministry of Health and Medical Education, March 2012, p. 48, accessed April 13, 2012, http://www.unaids.org/en/dataanalysis/monitoringcountryprogress/progressreports/2012countries/ce_IR_Narrative_Report.pdf.

⁶⁴ Ibid., pp. 15, 72.

populations-at-risk, and the reasons behind the discrepancy between estimated versus actual cases for people living with HIV?

Moreover, would contextual data on HIV/AIDS statistics better inform researchers, officials, and clerics when making decisions on targeted prevention of the illness? For instance, do current HIV rates include unprotected, sexual relations and sex only in married, heterosexual unions? Do these figures also consider sexual activity among young persons, single adults, or as extra-marital affairs? Why are there great discrepancies in the ratio of HIV-positive men to HIV-positive women?⁶⁵ If condom usage among IDUs—the highest population of HIV cases—is not standard, should statistics in fact reveal a higher ratio of HIV-positive women? Or do male HIV-positive IDUs practice abstinence? Moreover, are any of the HIV-positive patients members of particular communities affiliated with the state—such as the *Basij-e Mostazafin* (Mobilization of the Dispossessed), the Revolutionary Guards, war veterans, clerics, or state officials?⁶⁶ Given reports of drug addictions among war veterans and *basij* communities, do HIV/AIDS statistics reflect any occurrences or trends among specific communities that scholars have analyzed to be Iran’s “sacred social categories” (Iran-Iraq

⁶⁵ According to Iran’s 2012 monitoring report, among the indicator category “people who inject drugs and use condoms,” the national data showed that only 15.1% of IDUs used condoms; 16.1% with non-paid regular partners; and 15.3% with commercial partners or sex workers. Ibid., p. 9.

⁶⁶ The *Basij-e Mostazafin* is a volunteer, religious-military organization or paramilitary organization, dating back to the Iran-Iraq war. Individual members are referred to as *basij*. For information and commentary about the *Basij* and Iran’s veteran communities, see Abrahamian, *The Iranian Mojahedin* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989), pp. 64, 70. For further information about the role of Iran-Iraq war veterans and their status as “*shahid*” or martyrs, see Varzi (2006); Farhang Rajaei, *The Iran-Iraq War: The Politics of Aggression* (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 1993).

war veterans, the *basij*s and the Muslim family)?⁶⁷ As of this writing, MOHME reports on HIV/AIDS do not comment on any of the illuminating demographic details.

Despite the top-level and community-specific strategies implemented to mitigate the rates of infection, according to Pardis Mahdavi, “for many years the government refused to comment on the incidence of HIV in Iran, and researchers interested in this topic were discouraged from investigating the issue.”⁶⁸ The government reticence to publish comprehensive data about people living with HIV inside Iran is rooted in certain legal, social, cultural, and religious factors that, as a whole, continue to stigmatize the HIV-positive community. Consider the following variables: first, Iran’s religious authorities forbid premarital sex, and it is punishable by law. Second, family reputation is important in maintaining social status and ties; an HIV-positive diagnosis likely tarnishes one’s familial reputation and may lead to discrimination and/or being ostracized. Third, marriage (including one’s marriageability) is considered an ideal union between a man and woman, according to state and religious discourse.⁶⁹

According to Twelver Shi’a ideology, marriage is a necessary social institution and contract in preserving legitimate, heterosexual relations —and by extension, maintaining public morality and order. *Sigheh* or temporary marriage —a topic discussed in Chapter Three— complicates this objective in the case of sexually transmitted diseases. The institution of *sigheh* is stigmatized, and men and women who enter these

⁶⁷ For further information about drug addictions among these specific communities, see Christensen, pp. 138-145.

⁶⁸ Mahdavi, “Who Will Catch Me if I Fall? Health and the Infrastructure of Risk for Urban Young Iranians,” pp. 157-158.

⁶⁹ See Chapter Three of this dissertation for analysis on the Iranian state and religious discourse of temporary and permanent marriage.

unions typically do not publicize their relationship. Although sexual relations conducted during *sigheh* are permitted and encouraged, according to Twelver Shi'a discourse, there are certain problems that arise when the man or woman's health is compromised. In cases of sexually transmitted infection, there are issues of culpability as well as how to seek legal, medical, and monetary recourse. Suppose that HIV is contracted during a *sigheh* union and one of the parties is a carrier of the virus, knowingly or unknowingly. Also, suppose that the *sigheh* contract is conducted in secret—meaning, without the permanent wife or *sigheh* wife knowing of each other's existence. In what ways has this emphasis of marriage as a method of prevention and as a model framework for male and female relations authorized reckless behavior—specifically, irresponsible, sexual activity that is potentially medically dangerous? In the second half of this chapter, this scenario will transition from the hypothetical realm to social reality; it illustrates some of the serious issues that authorities, religious leaders, and citizens increasingly face.

Given the state's targeted reforms in HIV/AIDS treatment programs for its IDU demographic, it appears that clerical authorities and MOHME reports associate HIV/AIDS transmission in Iran more with drug abuse and addiction than with sexual intercourse.⁷⁰ To speak frankly about sex and sexual practice would require the government to “recognize the occurrences of premarital sexuality, prostitution, and homosexuality—to which heavy legal penalties apply.”⁷¹ And talking about HIV/AIDS is largely based on the assumption that the virus is directly related to extramarital sex –

⁷⁰ See Christensen, p. 135. Kamiar Alaie also confirmed this statement in telephone interview.

⁷¹ Ibid., p. 135. See also Islamic Republic of Iran Penal Code, Book 2, “*Hadd* Punishment for Adultery.”

which is forbidden.⁷² “In a country where high value is placed on ‘proper’ and ‘moral’ behavior, admitting a disease whose mode of transmission is primarily through unprotected sex and IDU is difficult.”⁷³ Because HIV/AIDS testing is neither encouraged nor obligatory for young people and unmarried couples, and the access to contraception is confined to pharmacies (free condoms are distributed in prisons), how should health workers and officials encourage Iranians to practice safe sex?⁷⁴

The Role of the Shi’a Ulama in HIV/AIDS Discourse

One cannot reflect on the status of HIV/AIDS in Iran without acknowledging the vital role of the Shi’a *ulama* in building public awareness of HIV/AIDS and determining the government’s health policies on the disease. Since the establishment of the Islamic Republic in 1979, clerical influence has been a mainstay in the construction and promotion of policies on health and family planning corresponding to Supreme Leader and *Velayat-e Faqih* (Absolute Guardianship of the Jurist) Khomeini’s *fatwas* on procreation and birth control.⁷⁵ In the past three decades, *ulama* involvement has shifted, undulating between issuing doctrinally-based responses on public health to offering pragmatic solutions for exigent problems, such as population policy in the face of rising

⁷² Mina Rasheed, “Iran: HIV/AIDS—More than a Social Taboo,” *Payvand News*, February 2, 2009, accessed March 21, 2012, <http://www.payvand.com/news/09/feb/1346.html>.

⁷³ Mahdavi, p. 157.

⁷⁴ As stated in Iran’s 2006 monitoring report, “There is no scheme for the social marketing of condoms specifically for safer sex, although condoms are provided without any restriction or limitation throughout the national network of PHC [Primary Health Care] clinics.” See “Declaration of Commitment,” *Islamic Republic of Iran Country Report: Monitoring of the United Nations General Assembly Special Session on HIV and AIDS*.

⁷⁵ Akbar Aghajanian, “Family Planning and Contraceptive Use in Iran, 1967-1992,” *International Family Planning Perspectives* 20, no. 2 (June 1994): p. 67.

food, housing, employment and health demands.⁷⁶ This was particularly evident in February 1988 when government and health officials sought to revamp the reproductive health and family planning programs of the Pahlavi-era, which would mean promoting reduced fertility rates, birth spacing intervals of 3 to 4 years, and contraceptive use among married couples in an effort to control Iran's growing population.⁷⁷ Moreover, these new policies reflected the government's modulation of Ayatollah Khomeini's decade-old pro-natalist edict encouraging the increase in the family size of Iranian Muslims during the Iran-Iraq war (1980-1988).⁷⁸ During the Khatami administration, *ulama* influence in response to the HIV/AIDS epidemic has followed a similar pragmatic trajectory in confronting the HIV/AIDS epidemic. MOHME officials and HIV/AIDS advocates were given the blessing of certain *ulama* to commence sexual education courses in schools, and some clerics even considered allowing the distribution of condoms to non-married young persons.⁷⁹

In a MOHME 2011 monitoring report, health officials state that there is an "increasing trend of community leaders, i.e. religious leaders, who are subsequently addressing issues such as prevention, stigmatization, and discrimination at the local and

⁷⁶ Aghajanian, p. 66.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ Amir Mehryar, Shirin Ahmad-Nia, and Shahla Kazemipour, "Reproductive Health in Iran: Pragmatic Achievements, Unmet Needs, and Ethical Challenges in a Theocratic System," *Studies in Family Planning* 38, no. 4 (Dec. 2007), pp. 352-361. For information on Ayatollah Khomeini's involvement in family planning policy. See also Diane M. Tober, Mohammad-Hossein Taghdisi, and Mohammad Jalali, "Fewer Children, Better Life" or "As Many as God Wants"? Family Planning among Low-Income Iranian and Afghan Refugee Families in Isfahan, Iran," *Medical Anthropology Quarterly* 20, no. 1, Medical Anthropology in the Muslim World: Ethnographic Reflections on Reproductive and Child Health (Mar. 2006): pp. 50-71.

⁷⁹ Mehryar, Ahmad-Nia, and Kazemipour, "Reproductive Health in Iran: Pragmatic Achievements, Unmet Needs, and Ethical Challenges in a Theocratic System," p. 358.

grass-root levels in Iran.”⁸⁰ Likewise, a 2011 UNAIDS report praises this involvement, deeming it exemplary within the region. UNAIDS has previously praised “the support of the ayatollahs in Iran for harm reduction programmes for people who inject drugs. With their support, the country’s harm reduction programme has become the most extensive and effective in the MENA region.”⁸¹ The report acknowledged:

In Iran, religious leaders are active participants in a project on psychosocial support to people living with HIV. This project, which is funded by the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria,⁸² is working with Islamic leaders on understanding the psychological and social aspects of HIV and providing them with the necessary knowledge and communication skills to support people living with HIV. As part of an initial needs assessment with participants, this project found that 83% of religious leaders believed in the participation of religious leaders and figures in psychosocial support for people living with HIV.⁸³

This assessment of clerical involvement in HIV/AIDS advocacy is misleading because it comments specifically on the intentions and not on the actual participation of Islamic leaders to offer support services for people living with HIV. Furthermore, the statement does not mention the results of this support, nor does it convey how precarious this support has become when Iran’s political leadership —namely, the President of Iran and his cabinet— changes. According to a 2008 study, conducted during Ahmadinejad’s first presidential term, most conservative religious leaders have been opposed to safe-sex curriculum, the promotion of condom usage, and needle-exchange programs, fearing that such education promotes acts prohibited by Islamic tenets (These forbidden acts include

⁸⁰ “The Prevention and Control of HIV/AIDS in I.R. Iran, Phases 1& 2,” UNDP Iran, 2011.

⁸¹ *UNAIDS Middle East and North Africa Regional Report on AIDS 2011*, p.73.

⁸² According to The Global Fund website, “The Global Fund is an international financing institution dedicated to attracting and disbursing resources to prevent and treat HIV and AIDS, TB and malaria.” See The Global Fund, “Who We Are.” The Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria, 2012, accessed April 30, 2012, <http://www.theglobalfund.org/en/about/whoweare/>.

⁸³ *Ibid*, p. 73.

premarital sex, homosexuality, and intravenous drug use.)⁸⁴ During official gatherings of Friday prayer in Tehran, when sermons are broadcast on state television, the Shi'a clerical establishment (including Grand Ayatollahs, Ayatollahs and Hojjataleslam clerics) have not yet commented on the HIV epidemic and the rise in domestic cases of HIV. The responsibility of disseminating information to the general public usually falls upon lower level clerics in the vast hierarchy of the clergy, who address social issues to their local communities.⁸⁵ In areas where MOHME resources are not comprehensive or readily accessible, clerics fill in necessary social roles by informing the public of taboo topics, such as HIV.

The most recent public statements about HIV/AIDS, published in 2012, have come from influential Grand Ayatollah Abdollah Javadi-Amoli, who announced that "God had punished [Western] society with HIV/AIDS for legally permitting homosexuality...Problems like AIDS didn't exist before."⁸⁶ Presently, few *marja'e taqlid* have issued *fatwas* (doctrinal pronouncements) on HIV/AIDS prevention methods for the general public.⁸⁷ Grand Ayatollah Yousef Saanei has issued the most *fatwas*

⁸⁴ See Kalkhoran and Lauren Hale, "AIDS Education in an Islamic Nation: Content Analysis of Farsi-language AIDS-education Materials in Iran."

⁸⁵ See Hamid Dabashi, *Shi'ism: A Religion of Protest* (Boston: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2011); Moojan Momen, *An Introduction to Shi'i Islam: The History and Doctrines of Twelver Shi'ism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985).

⁸⁶ See "Ezharat-e Ayatollah Javadi Amoli darbaraye Hamjesbazi-ye Qanouni dar Gharb/ Statements of Ayatollah Javadi-Amoli's the West's Legalization of Homosexuality," *Khabar News*, 28 Farvardin 1391/ April 16, 2012, accessed April 20, 2012, <http://www.khabaronline.ir/detail/208221/culture/religion>. See also, Saeed Kamali Dehghan, "Homosexuals are Inferior to Dogs and Pigs, Says Iranian Cleric," *The Guardian.co.uk*, April 18, 2012, accessed April 20, 2012, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/iran-blog/2012/apr/18/iran-cleric-condemns-homosexuality>.

⁸⁷ *Fatwas* are advisory, written, or oral juristic statements issued by Islamic *muftis* (legal scholars), based on their knowledge of the *Qur'an* and the *sunnah* (body of traditional social and legal custom and practice for Muslims).

concerning HIV-AIDS-related issues. When asked about preventive methods against HIV, he stated that he supported the distribution of clean syringes to drug addicts and approved AIDS awareness education in schools.⁸⁸ Grand Ayatollah Makarem Shirazi has issued one *fatwa* concerning “AIDS high-risk education,” and he forbids the marriage between an HIV-infected person and a Muslim girl.⁸⁹

Prescribing Islam as a Preventive Measure against HIV

“The best prescription in the struggle against AIDS is Islam,” remarked cleric Hojjat al-Eslam Mohammad Taghi Sarfipour, a leader of Friday prayer from the city Pol-e Dokhtar in Lorestan Province.⁹⁰ In a 2010 interview with semi-official Fars News Agency, Sarfipour discussed the presence of AIDS’ in his community, deeming it “one of the worst phenomenon we’re facing.” As a solution for the prevention of the spread of HIV, he suggested that believers seek guidance and direction from the religious sources in Islam. “Islamic teachings,” he clarified, “are very good for reaching human growth and evolving as human beings, which has been ordained for us. If we follow these orders

⁸⁸ See “Amouzesh-e Ommumi dar Pishgiri az AIDS/Public Education about AIDS Prevention,” Grand Ayatollah Saanei *Fatwas*, accessed June 1, 2012, <http://www.feqh.org/fa/estefta/estefta46.htm>.

⁸⁹ The *fatwa* mentioned in this section is dated June 5, 2007, and was reported in Iran’s 2010 HIV/AIDS monitoring report. See *Islamic Republic of Iran Progress Report: Monitoring of the United Nations General Assembly Special Session on HIV and AIDS*, p. 68. Makarem Shirazi issued another *fatwa* concerning the marriage between a Muslim who is infected with HIV. He responded that if the marriage creates any danger to the health of the other, marriage is not permitted. See “Select *Fatwas* of Ayatollah Makarem Shirazi on Marriage and Family,” Islamopedia Online, accessed June 1, 2012, <http://www.islamopediaonline.org/fatwa/select-fatwas-ayatollah-makarem-shirazi-marriage-and-family>.

⁹⁰ Lorestan Province is located in Western Iran, amidst the Zagros Mountains. “Behtarin Noskhe-ye Mobarezeh ba AIDS Din-e Eslam Ast /The Best Prescription in the Fight Against AIDS is Islam.” Fars News Agency, 15 Azar 1389/ December 6, 2010, accessed April 30, 2012. <http://www.farsnews.com/newstext.php?nn=8909151208>.

well, we'll never suffer from moral decline and incurable diseases.”⁹¹ Sarfipour's statements parallel the suggestions of other religious leaders in Iran, who appear to interpret HIV/AIDS as a religious issue. Thus the methods they suggest to control the HIV/AIDS epidemic necessarily involve a believer's adherence to social and moral principles discussed in Islamic texts and teachings. Prevention of the spread of HIV is communicated as leading a pious and moral lifestyle, whereby monogamy, abstinence, and being faithful become deterrent mechanisms.⁹²

However studies show that these efforts are limited to a small area and do not reflect a general trend of clerical engagement in HIV/AIDS-related issues nor that the illness is considered a pressing matter of public health and of religious importance. Additionally, studies have shown mixed results about the strategy of treating HIV/AIDS prevention as a religious concern. A population-based study in Iran found that about 80% of the respondents agreed with the notion that the lack of religious and moral commitments could result in AIDS infection.⁹³ In a study by Mohammadi et al., boys who regarded themselves as “religious” had less knowledge of sexual issues compared with those who regarded themselves as being “somewhat religious” or “not religious.”⁹⁴ And despite recent studies expressing public desire to learn more about

⁹¹“Ibid.

⁹² See Kalkhoran and Hale, “AIDS Education in an Islamic Nation: Content Analysis of Farsi-language AIDS-education Materials in Iran.

⁹³ See Ali Montazeri, “AIDS Knowledge and Attitudes in Iran: Results from a Population-based Survey in Tehran,” *Patient Education and Counseling* 57 (2005): pp. 199-203.

⁹⁴ See Mohammad Reza Mohammadi et al., “Reproductive Knowledge, Attitudes and Behavior among Adolescent Males in Tehran, Iran,” *International Family Planning Perspectives* 32, no. 1 (2006): pp. 35-44.

HIV/AIDS through an evidence-based approach to HIV/AIDS policy and research, the clerical establishment has not changed its course.⁹⁵

Given MOHME's recent warning of demographic shifts in the domestic HIV epidemic, in the context of stigmatization and taboo associated with the virus, how do policymakers, clerics, and HIV/AIDS advocates tackle such a politically and socially sensitive public health issue? How do they properly address HIV/AIDS-related issues (such as access to medical treatment, insurance costs, discrimination, among many others) when there is considerable top-level resistance to investigating the cultural, political and social reasons for the rise in HIV rates? Moreover, what resources are available for those populations that do not fit into the categories of "high-risk"?

⁹⁵ See Tavoosi, et al., "Knowledge and Attitude towards HIV/AIDS among Iranian Students." A. Feizzadeh, "Evidence-based Approach to HIV/AIDS Policy and Research Prioritization in Islamic Republic of Iran," *Eastern Mediterranean Health Journal* 16, no. 3 (March 2010): pp. 259-265. C.A. Yazdi et al., "Knowledge, Attitudes and Sources of Information Regarding HIV/AIDS in Iranian Adolescents."

Part II: Reformulating the Taboo of “Vulnerable” Women and HIV/AIDS

The Resulting Shifts in State Discourse of HIV/AIDS and Sex: From Prisons to the General Public

When infections began to appear in non-incarcerated populations, authorities and health experts grew worried about the potential for a public health explosion in other demographics. HIV/AIDS was now affecting communities that were not included as “high-risk groups” from previous indicator reports.⁹⁶ As HIV rates increased, health officials began to remark on the sexual transmission of the virus, which they perceived would jeopardize the HIV/AIDS policies already set in place and published in MOHME’s monitoring reports.⁹⁷ AIDS advocates voiced their concerns about the efficacy of certain prevention programs against the spread of HIV, calling them inadequate in dealing with the pace of HIV infections via sexual transmission—that is, through unprotected, premarital and marital sexual relations.⁹⁸ In the February 2010 MOHME report, entitled *Monitoring of the UN General Assembly Special Session on HIV and AIDS*, the Ministry

⁹⁶ This group includes female sex workers, inmates, intravenous drug addicts and their sex partners, prisoners, men who have sex with men, and street children.

⁹⁷ Esfandiari, “Iran: Tehran Begins to Confront the ‘Time Bomb’ of HIV/AIDS. What was in 2006 considered a relatively stable figure of 5 to 8 percent transmission via sexual intercourse, by 2010 became an issue of increasing concern for more health officials and public health experts.

⁹⁸ *Islamic Republic of Iran Progress Report: Monitoring of the United Nations General Assembly Special Session on HIV and AIDS*, National AIDS Committee Secretariat, Iran Ministry of Health and Medical Education, February 2010, p. 14, accessed April 14, 2012. http://www.unaids.org/en/dataanalysis/monitoringcountryprogress/progressreports/2010countries/iran_2010_country_progress_report_en.pdf. In the 2011 report, Iranian researchers state, “The share of sexual transmission in the identified cases remained relatively stable until 2006 standing at approximately 5-8% but the absolute value of this percentage has been rising continuously and has gone from 50 cases in 2000 to almost three times that much in 2006. This trend has been on the rise ever since reaching a total of around 13% of all the identified cases in 2008. The major factor behind this rise is the increase in identifying female cases.” Ibid., p. 14.

disclosed some crucial obstacles to the improvement of rising transmission numbers.⁹⁹ It determined:

Currently, the major cause for concern when it comes to an uncontrollable HIV epidemic among the general public is risky sexual behaviors among the youths, the general public, and certain other population cohorts such as sex workers, MSM [men who have sex with men], and their linking rings with injecting drug users. Accordingly, policymakers, planners, clerics, other key groups, and the general public must be sensitized in this regard and their support must be gained particularly to conduct life skills training among youths and the general public and also safer sex promotion for all high-risk and at-risk groups. Furthermore, stable marriages and reinforcing the institution of the family can play a decisive role in HIV prevention.¹⁰⁰

One year after publishing this report, Iranian health officials provided mixed statements to the media about the domestic status of HIV/AIDS. In a 2011 progress report on Iran's obligations to its UNDP Goals in HIV/AIDS prevention, Iran's representatives in UNDP¹⁰¹ lauded the cooperation between the MOHME, the Prisons Organization, and the Ministry of Education in promoting awareness about the virus among university

⁹⁹ The report specified the risky behaviour of youth, the general public, and injecting drug users; by risky behaviour, the government means unprotected sexual activities, which were the primary reasons for the expansion of HIV prevalence across the country." See *Islamic Republic of Iran Progress Report: Monitoring of the United Nations General Assembly Special Session on HIV and AIDS*, National AIDS Committee Secretariat, Iran Ministry of Health and Medical Education, February 2010, p. 3, accessed April 14, 2012, http://www.unaids.org/en/dataanalysis/monitoringcountryprogress/progressreports/2010countries/iran_2010_country_progress_report_en.pdf.

¹⁰⁰ *Islamic Republic of Iran Progress Report: Monitoring of the United Nations General Assembly Special Session on HIV and AIDS*, National AIDS Committee Secretariat, Iran Ministry of Health and Medical Education, UNAIDS, February 2010, p. 100, accessed April 25, 2010, http://www.unaids.org/en/dataanalysis/monitoringcountryprogress/progressreports/2010countries/iran_2010_country_progress_report_en.pdf.

¹⁰¹ For this project, UNDP-Iran partnered with the Ministry of Health Centre for Disease Control, Prisons Organization, Ministry of Education, Welfare Organization, University of Medical Sciences, the Islamic Republic of Iran Broadcasting, and the Iranian Blood Transfusion Organization.

students and prisoners.¹⁰² In this report, they stated, “The approach taken by the Government to openly address the problem with the public during the recent years and the success of this project have brought international recognition for the country.”¹⁰³

Critics at Tehran’s Center for AIDS Research and MOHME’s own AIDS division were skeptical; in the Iranian press, they are quoted speaking less of successes and more about on-the-ground consequences: Infectious disease specialist and head of Iran’s AIDS Research Center Minoo Mohraz stated that 99 percent of new HIV infections were due to sexual transmission.¹⁰⁴ (In an interview published by the Tehran University of Medical Sciences, a direct sponsor of the AIDS Research Center, Mohraz is quoted stating that HIV prevention should improve with an increase in harm reduction programs for IDUS and if Iranians took preventive measures such as “abstaining from intercourse before marriage, being committed to partners during marriage and practicing safer sex, use of condoms were safe methods to prevent HIV infection.”)¹⁰⁵

Likewise, Abbas Sedaghat, the director of the MOHME’s AIDS division, warned that Iran had fallen into a “red danger” zone, stating that the conditions were ripe for a third wave of an HIV epidemic. As quoted in *Etemad* newspaper, he stated, “There are indications that the AIDS contraction model in Iran is changing from shared syringes

¹⁰² See “The Prevention and Control of HIV/AIDS in I.R. Iran, Phases 1& 2,” UNDP Iran, 2011. The same report calculates that “a total of 370,303 university students, prisoners and their family members (people belonging to “At-Risk” and “High-Risk” groups) were reached through HIV/AIDS peer education.”

¹⁰³ Ibid.

¹⁰⁴ “Navad va No Darsad-e Bimaran-e Jadid-e AIDS az Tariq-e Ravebet-e Jensi Mobtala Shodand/ 99 Percent of New AIDS Infections through Sexual Relations,” Fars News Agency, 9 Khordad 1391/ May 29, 2012, accessed June 3, 2012, <http://www.farsnews.com/newstext.php?nn=13910309000837>.

¹⁰⁵ “Dr. Minoo Mohraz Stresses on the Prevention of Diseases such as HIV/AIDS for Maintaining a Healthy Society,” *Tehran University of Medical Sciences Public Relations News*, December 7, 2011, accessed June 1, 2012, <http://publicrelations.tums.ac.ir/english/news/detail.asp?newsID=29111>.

toward sexual contacts... Unfortunately, the two main target groups, addicts using syringes and those with irresponsible sexual behavior, may together exacerbate the spread of this disease," he said.¹⁰⁶ Although the director did not disclose the exact nature and context of these relations, he commented on the "alarming rates" found in "women as a group."¹⁰⁷

UNAIDS reports that this growing trend in HIV-positive women is being observed across the MENA region: "The rise in the estimated number of people living with HIV in the region presumably is the result of an increased HIV prevalence among key populations at higher risk and a forward transmission of the virus to a larger number of individuals who are generally at lower risk of infection."¹⁰⁸ UNAIDS reports that women account for 50 percent of people living with HIV (PLWH); young women are particularly vulnerable to HIV infection rates, accounting for 22 percent of all new HIV infections.¹⁰⁹ In the MENA region, women comprise an estimated 41% of adult PLWH cases. The majority of these women are infected by their husbands or partners who

¹⁰⁶ "Iran Intensifies Campaign against HIV," Fars News Agency, November 11, 2008, accessed June 1, 2012, <http://english.farsnews.com/newstext.php?nn=8709061775>.

¹⁰⁷ Chalesh-e Vazir-e Behdasht ba Sazman-e Nezam Pezeshki/ Minister of Health's Challenges with the Medical Council of the Islamic Republic of Iran," *Afkar News*, 21 Ordibehesht 1391/ May 10, 2012, accessed May 20, 2012, <http://www.ghatreh.com/news/nn9805044/> -نظام-سازمان-بهداشت-وزیر-چالش/پزشکی.

Abbas Sedaghat also warned about the return of the rise in HIV infections among prisoners. See "Negarani az Bazgasht-e Mojaddad Moj-e AIDS dar Zandanha-ye Iran/Worries for the Return of the AIDS Epidemic Wave Among Prisoners in Iran," *Emruz News*, 13 Esfand 1390/ March 3, 2012, accessed April 19, 2012, <http://www.emruznews.com/2012/03/post-9499.php>.

¹⁰⁸ UNAIDS, *Middle East and North Africa Regional Report on AIDS*, 2011, p. 1.

¹⁰⁹ "Women, Girls, Gender Equality and HIV Fact Sheet," UNAIDS, February 2012, accessed March 1, 2012, http://www.unaids.org/en/media/unaids/contentassets/documents/factsheet/2012/20120217_FS_WomenGirls_en.pdf.

engage in high-risk behaviors and are mostly unaware of their status.¹¹⁰ In Iran, the most recent statistics reveal that of the 23, 497 registered cases of HIV patients, 8.7% are women.¹¹¹ (Compared to September 2005, among 12, 556 persons reported as HIV-positive, 5.4% of the cases were women.)¹¹²

HIV advocates have sought to improve women's access to health care services and to demand their legal rights and protections even despite the poor political and social support to mitigate the stigma of the disease. Since the late 1990s, there have been continuing efforts across the globe for the plight of HIV-positive women. Along with WHO and UNAIDS efforts, non-governmental organizations have joined forces to provide increased access and networking among the community of people living with the virus. "A tension exists between the needs of people living with HIV and the economic and social realities in many developing countries, where health care services for the entire population are grossly under-resourced."¹¹³

Accessing HIV prevention, treatment and care services are caused by barriers that stem from socioeconomic inequalities, thus limiting decision-making powers, control, resources and mobility of HIV-positive women and their families.¹¹⁴ For many Iranian women widowed by AIDS and now HIV-positive themselves, accessing health care and

¹¹⁰ See "Women, Girls, Gender Equality and HIV Fact Sheet," UNAIDS, p. 3.

¹¹¹ *Islamic Republic of Iran Progress Report: Monitoring of the United Nations General Assembly Special Session on HIV and AIDS*, National AIDS Committee Secretariat, Ministry of Health and Medical Education, March 2012, p. 11.

¹¹² See "Declaration of Commitment," *Islamic Republic of Iran Country Report: Monitoring of the United Nations General Assembly Special Session on HIV and AIDS*, Office of the Under-Secretary for Health, Ministry of Health and Medical Education, Centre for Disease Management, January 2006.

¹¹³ Bell et al., "Sexual and Reproductive Health Services and HIV Testing: Perspectives and Experiences of Women and Men Living with HIV and AIDS," p. 114.

¹¹⁴ See "Women, Girls, Gender Equality and HIV Fact Sheet," UNAIDS, p. 1.

forming support networks are matters best solved by Iran's NGO community. For Iran's official statistics and research studies on the HIV/AIDS core indicator reports do not mention the real communities directly affected by HIV and the sociopolitical and economic repercussions associated with this virus. Rarely does the state's HIV/AIDS discourse mention what happens after HIV escalates into full-blown AIDS, when wives become widows and must face a variety of pressures, be they public, religious, cultural, economic, and familial. Their exclusion from government reports is troublesome, as United Nations regional reports on HIV/AIDS state that "a large proportion of women living with HIV in the MENA region are believed to have acquired their infection from their spouses who practice high-risk behaviors."¹¹⁵ How do HIV-positive women in particular grapple with these pressures while receiving minimal — even inconsistent — government and societal support?

HIV/AIDS State Discourse in Iran: Accountability and Rhetoric versus Reality

In the past twenty-five years since the virus's domestic detection, the state's HIV/AIDS policy and advocacy have been mired in opposing political, religious, and social conflicts. Two major factors contributing to these challenges are the taboo-laden associations and stereotypes attributed to HIV/AIDS patients and their lifestyles.¹¹⁶ That

¹¹⁵ UNAIDS Middle East and North Africa Regional Report on AIDS 2011, p. 11.

¹¹⁶ Social stigma of HIV on risk groups is one of many challenges that impede efforts to deter rising HIV infection rates. According to Iran's March 2012 progress report on HIV/AIDS, these challenges include: the insufficient number of competent NGOs, lack of suitable programs for street children; expensive diagnostic services; limited complementary examinations in provincial districts thus necessitating patient referrals to other cities; treatment interruptions perhaps due to patient non-compliance, simultaneous drug addiction or intermittent incarcerations; limited laboratory facilities for certain important tests; the need for improvement in the quality of existing services; and the shortage of financial and human resources to deliver care services to home-bound people living with HIV (PLWH). See *Islamic Republic of Iran*

being HIV-positive marks the carrier with a particular taboo status is confirmed in research studies, media reports, and government statements about the subject of HIV/AIDS. According to a qualitative study by Rahmati, et al., nearly all HIV patients felt stigmatized and discriminated by healthcare providers in a variety of contexts.¹¹⁷ his treatment has resulted in patients postponing or avoiding receiving therapeutic services; revealing their disease to therapeutic staff; feeling motivated to protect their health; some feeling a sense of malice or vengeance; using alternative medicine and not antiretroviral treatment; or feeling emotionally stressed.

As for HIV-positive women, state, religious, and public discourses regards them as occupying a particularly vulnerable position, one linked to drug and other criminal networks. Government monitoring HIV/AIDS reports also link them to high-risk behaviour. As recently as 2011, Iran's acting director of the MOHME reported that:

The majority of women living with HIV in Iran are indicated to be spouses of injecting drug users. However, these centers address special needs of all HIV vulnerable women including spouses of male drug users or male prisoners, female drug users and the women with high risk behaviors.¹¹⁸

However acknowledging the existence of an emerging demographic of HIV-positive women has not yet translated into government financial and public health support. As evidenced by the high concentration of HIV-positive cases among Iran's IDU, prisoner, and prostitute demographics, specialized funding and social support for single women and widowed mothers are in limited supply—an alarming circumstance given

Progress Report: Monitoring of the United Nations General Assembly Special Session on HIV and AIDS, National AIDS Committee Secretariat, Ministry of Health and Medical Education, March 2012, pp. 34, 44, 48, 53, 56.

¹¹⁷ F. Rahmati-Najarkolaei, Sh. Niknami, F. Aminshokravi, M. Bazargan, Ahmadi, A. Hadjizadeh, et al. "Experiences of Stigma in Healthcare Settings among Adults Living with HIV in the Islamic Republic of Iran." *Journal of the International AIDS Society* 13, no. 27 (2010): pp. 1-11.

¹¹⁸ Nikman, "United Nations High-level Meeting on HIV/AIDS Statement." *Supranote* 25.

that the number of women living with HIV has increased in recent years, according to Iran's MOHME.¹¹⁹ Thus, one inquires, where do HIV-positive Iranian women seek support to improve their health and livelihoods?

SPASDI: Confronting HIV/AIDS for Iranian Mothers

The fundamental principle is to teach fishing, while providing fish.—K. Mansourian, SPASDI director

Since its establishment in 1999, Tehran-based SPASDI (the Society for the Protection and Assistance of Socially Disadvantaged Individuals) has gone from a nonprofit organization determined to “help prevent social disorders, protect the foundation of the family, and offer support to vulnerable individuals and families who are victims of social disadvantages” to one also committed to the protection of women and children with HIV.¹²⁰ Because of Iran's mounting societal problems due to poverty, prostitution, homelessness, AIDS, and divorce, Director Khosrou Mansourian¹²¹ has individually steered the organization towards providing crucial services where the Iranian government does not. It provides professional counseling and a confidential hotline

¹¹⁹ *Monitoring of the United Nations General Assembly Special Session on HIV and AIDS*, National AIDS Committee Secretariat, Iran Ministry of Health and Medical Education, February 2010, p. 14, accessed April 14, 2012, http://www.unaids.org/en/dataanalysis/monitoringcountryprogress/progressreports/2010countries/iran_2010_country_progress_report_en.pdf.

¹²⁰ SPASDI began raising awareness and offering public outreach, speaking on university campuses and in government ministries and agencies, to better assist children with disabilities. Their social programs have expanded to meet the demand of natural disasters (they helped facilitate emergency aid to earthquake victims in Bam, an ancient city where roughly 70% was destroyed).

¹²¹ Mansourian is also credited for his contribution to the seminal research report, authored by Sattareh Farman Farmaian, on the living conditions of prostitutes in the former Pahlavi-era red-light district *Shahr-e No*. See Chapter Two of this dissertation.

service; professional rehabilitation for children with mental and physical disabilities; self-help workshops; art exhibitions; and AIDS special services.

Since 2007, SPASDI has concentrated on tackling the controversial issue of HIV/AIDS because it contends that Iran has entered a “third stage of HIV-AIDS epidemic” caused initially by intravenous drug abuse and more recently, by unprotected sexual relations. In many ways, SPASDI mediates between HIV/AIDS state policy and how gender is enacted at a lived level. HIV-positive widows, seeking emotional support and financial assistance, are introduced to this organization typically via word-of-mouth and recommendations from state hospitals, such as Tehran’s Imam Khomeini hospital. Yet obtaining help from this non-profit is not an easy task producing immediate results. Women who ask about SPASDI’s social services are immediately informed that they must not dramatize the HIV virus or its impact—that by receiving help they agree to begin the long process of breaking down this social taboo and changing their own assumptions and ignorance about the illness.¹²² This happens via the women’s individual efforts to improve social awareness of the disease—educating friends and strangers on basic facts and methods of transmission—and eventually, letting others know that they are HIV-positive.

Accepting and then affirming that one has the HIV virus is a fundamental SPASDI principle. The organization expressly discourages being silent about an HIV-positive diagnosis—they reason that not disclosing this information creates and increases

¹²² In one meeting, a SPASDI social worker predicted that the societal treatment of those who have HIV/AIDS would improve just as it had for those afflicted by syphilis, which, almost fifty years earlier, was a common STD among rural and urban communities. See Chapter Two of this dissertation for more information about the syphilis epidemic in early 20th century Iran.

the risk of spreading the disease.¹²³ Often volunteers (although none who are HIV - positive) wear pins and t-shirts that state, “I am HIV-positive.” This is done not only in recognition of the global effort to destigmatize the illness and increase public awareness, but also to symbolize solidarity for the women and children of the center who do live with the virus.

A Community of HIV-positive Mothers: Madaran-e Hami-ye Salamat

As in many countries around the globe, it is still taboo to speak about sexual education and HIV/AIDS. In Iran, where factors —such as stigmatization, poor resources, and misconceptions about the disease— are many, single mothers are especially at risk. As Mansourian has explained, “Many of these victims don’t have a proper understanding of HIV-AIDS and its implications for them. Moreover, they are afraid to openly disclose their illness, due to the negative biases regarding the disease in society. Those who do disclose their HIV infection are deprived of the simplest social services (e.g. refusal by dentists or other physicians to provide medical services, rejection from jobs, deprivation of children from school registration).”¹²⁴ For the aforementioned reasons, SPASDI regards this group as “harmed victims,” especially in a social context where negative biases and misinformation towards the disease prevail.¹²⁵

¹²³ “AIDS Special Services: Activities for AIDS Victims: Single Mother Families & Children,” SPASDI, August 1, 2010, accessed April 14, 2012, <http://spasdi.ir/en/?p=52>.

¹²⁴ MOHME reports concur with Mansourian’s assessment. According to Iran’s March 2012 monitoring report: “HIV-positive persons who are known to engage in high-risk behaviors tend to refrain from accessing counseling center, laboratories, mental health specialists, and other services; consulting these services could potentially result in their public identification.” See *Islamic Republic of Iran Progress Report: Monitoring of the United Nations General Assembly Special Session on HIV and AIDS*, p. 61.

¹²⁵ “AIDS Special Services: Activities for AIDS Victims: Single Mother Families & Children,” SPASDI.

Since December 2007, the center has held mandatory hour and a half sessions for mothers living with HIV, under the program title *Madaran-e Hami-ye Salamat* (Mothers Supporting Health). For over a year, between July 2010 and October 2011, I attended these weekly meetings and gradually began to understand more about its inner-dynamics as well as about the women who chose to attend the meetings regularly.

The women in this group were similar in two ways: they were all at various stages of being HIV-positive, and they traveled great distances to reach the center in Tehran. Kermanshah, Qom, Karaj, Mashad, Bandar Abbas and Quchan were some of the names of cities and towns from where these women traveled and originated. (Some mothers would begin their travel in the early hours of the morning and others the night before, hoping to reach the center by the 9:30 a.m. meeting time.)

Yet traveling long distances was the least of their worries. Widowed and facing single-parenthood, they focused on maintaining their CD4 levels and that of their children, many of whom are also HIV-positive. These women also dealt with pressures to earn a living and provide food and shelter for their children. In addition, many have expressed frustration in navigating the state's leviathan health care and welfare network. In order to continue receiving their monthly antiretroviral treatment, they must know which clinics offer safe and accessible health care.

Among the nine women who attended consistently (about twenty were expected to come each week), seven of them were mothers of young children, ranging in age from a few months to a twenty-five-year old. The majority of the women were also widowed after their spouses died from AIDS-related illnesses —having contracted the virus through intravenous drug use, sexual relations with other women, or through other means

during the period of incarceration. (As an exception, there was an HIV-positive woman in her late twenties who attended *Madaran-e Hami-ye Salamat*. She had not been married and did not reveal to the group and its facilitators how she contracted the virus. She began attending their workshops after an acquaintance informed her about the emotional support services SPASDI offered.)

Many of the mothers attending SPASDI workshops had entered the organization under severe psychological pressure, suffering from financial duress, depression, and family isolation. Women were struggling with lack of emotional support; in certain cases, family members who learned of their diagnosis refused to speak about their infection; in many cases, they did not permit their daughters to return home. (These accumulating pressures had led some of the women to attempt suicide.) These personal details were common knowledge among the participants. When a new mother would join the group, others would often update her on the other members' marriage status, children, hometown, and crucially, under what circumstances they contracted the HIV virus.

This very topic (how these women contracted the disease) was often a mutual point of reference and common denominator. In certain cases, their husbands' extramarital relations and temporary marriage partnerships (to which their permanent wives were not privy) were largely responsible for how they contracted the virus. In other cases, because some of the women were unaware of their husbands' intravenous drug usage, they were still sexually active with their spouses. These variables are all important considerations in questioning Iran's official discourses of HIV/AIDS. They elaborate how an emerging demographic of HIV-positive women is not necessarily participatory in high-risk behaviors. Instead, it is their (now-deceased) husbands.

The weekly meetings of *Madaran-e Hami-ye Salamat* usually took place on Monday mornings. Mansourian's volunteer corps of social workers and retired nurses chaired each session, and by all accounts, each meeting was unique—a credit to the discussions and interactions of diverse personalities within the group.

For the last few workshops in the summer of 2011, the director brought in health experts to teach these women how to eat more nutrient-rich foods and improve their dental hygiene. Staff members spoke extensively about fortifying their immune systems with exercise, nutrition, positive thinking, and spotting drug addiction. Often moderators showed informational videos on these subjects, followed by short lectures on self-confidence, self-awareness, and compassion. They repeatedly discussed these themes in an effort to promote positive self-esteem among the group members. When it came time for group discussion, conversations were often speckled with personal tales about their children and economic hardships—or, during other candid moments, about flirtatious advances of male admirers.

Almost every week, the moderator asked questions about each person's state of mind, health status, and if they had any particular difficulties and thoughts they would like to share. Soon after, one of the group's mothers—who had volunteered the previous week to prepare the next week's group activity based on a particular theme—would take over discussion. These brainstorming sessions were often interrupted by whispers and side conversations between women or between women and their little children. (Children would often be present towards the end of the workshops; they would shyly enter the room, no longer wanting to remain on the upper floor's nursery.)

On the occasions when director Mansourian was present, the level of seriousness and concentration heightened. I noticed that the moment he entered the workshop room, the mothers would immediately sit up straight, adjusting their hair by neatly tucking it under their *rousaris* and *chadors*.¹²⁶ Side conversations would come to a halt, and any group member who arrived late would typically wait near the room's entrance, preferring not to enter until his lectures had finished.

A discussion session led by Mansourian was often informative, dynamic, and filled with a medley of anecdotes. He included inspirational stories, as common reference points, from the *Qur'an* and *hadith*. On other occasions, his stories referenced Iranian television shows and films to compliment these anecdotes.¹²⁷ He pointed to individual mothers, referencing their children, stories of success and overcoming obstacles. Mansourian had an encyclopedic knowledge of each member's personal history, after having spent years working to provide them social services tailored to their circumstances. In the workshops I had attended, he consistently addressed the women with respect, and by meeting's end, many of the members had asked him to help solve any problem they faced in their homes, neighborhoods, and at government health agencies.

Once the director departed, the women relaxed their positions. Tea and sweets were served, and during break-time, women would update one another, carrying on

¹²⁶ A *chador* is a long garment, also described as an open cloak, worn by Iranian women in observance of Islamic *hejab*.

¹²⁷ I recall a particular lecture on the narrative of *Musa* (Moses) and Bani Israel. Mansourian had encouraged the participants to believe in their collective efforts—to increase HIV/AIDS awareness and destigmatize the disease—even though the end goal, which Mansourian had compared to *Qur'anic* and Biblical accounts about the parting of the Red Sea, seemed an impossible feat. He said, “You must have faith even in a path where there is no faith. We must make ourselves stronger in the face of societal problems.” Excerpt taken from workshop on July 26, 2011 at SPASDI headquarters in Tehran.

personal conversations or sharing stories for the entire group. On more than half of these occasions, certain mothers reported on their CD4 white blood cell count.¹²⁸ When a woman's CD4 count was low, the typical reactions were an outpouring of compassionate words and actions. At most meetings, a number of women were absent. The reasons for this were varied—some health-related and others financial and personal. (According to my interviews with two of SPASDI's social workers, in some cases, mothers stopped showing up after fearing their families would find out about their health status.)

But the seminars were not just information sessions about healthy approaches to living with HIV. They were also opportunities for share positive news, to form a supportive community and network, and to become financially independent. It was often throughout the seminars that Mansourian and his organizers expressed joy upon hearing news that two of the women had remarried—in one case, a member had gotten remarried to an HIV negative man who knew of his wife's condition and willfully practiced safe sex with her. (This happened very rarely.) According to director Mansourian, "This is a success, given the fact that even remarriage for healthy divorced or widowed women is faced with lots of cultural barriers in Iran, let alone for HIV infected women."¹²⁹

There was also news of financial stability and progress made in raising awareness about the illness. Because SPASDI administered personal loans from private donors to women seeking stable housing, some of the mothers were able to buy their own small

¹²⁸ CD4 cells are clusters of white blood cells or lymphocytes and are an important part in fortifying the immune system. A low CD4 count means the immune system is weakened and thus the ability to fight off infections is compromised. HIV most often infects and becomes part of these cells; when infections form, these cells multiply and make more copies of HIV. See *The Body: The Complete HIV/AIDS Resource Fact Sheet, CD4 (T-Cell Tests)*, The Body.com, March 29, 2012, accessed April 14, 2012, <http://www.thebody.com/content/6110/cd4-t-cell-tests.html#anchor251>.

¹²⁹ "AIDS Special Services: Activities for AIDS Victims: Single Mother Families & Children," SPASDI.

apartments. A few of them received smaller loans from the organization itself in order to start a home-based, small business. During one of the meetings, a participant spoke of her excitement after selling her handicrafts at the annual show-and-tell event marking the end of Ramadan. At this event, SPASDI encouraged women to be guest speakers before an audience of donors, relatives, friends, government officials and religious intellectuals supportive of Mansourian's work. (At the last two events I attended, Mohammad Mojtabeh Shabbestari, renowned Shi'a philosopher and once a close ally of President Khatami, was in attendance and had also delivered a congratulatory speech to SPASDI and the mothers.)

Interviewing Methodology: One Meeting at a Time

For almost thirteen months, I attended SPASDI's weekly educational workshops. My attendance involved partial observation and, in the first six months of attendance, minimal participation with the group. Initially the director and social workers were concerned that my presence would unsettle the workshop participants. To assure the safety and comfort of the women, the director and I agreed that I would attend the workshops as an observer and, after brief introductions and consistent attendance for several months, I would be permitted to interact more with the group. If I wanted to converse with the women outside of class, it was my responsibility to gain permission from each of the group members, along with the SPASDI staff. Furthermore, if at any moment they would feel uncomfortable about my presence and subsequently voice concern to the director or moderators, I had agreed to depart on friendly terms.

My observer status quickly disappeared after just one meeting. The moment the mothers learned I spoke Persian and was personally connected to the director, they began to ask me questions about my family background, education, research interests and project, and even my love for Persian food.¹³⁰

At first, our conversations and interactions were limited. Save smiling and attending meetings, I was quiet and did not approach any of the participants individually. I remained a physical helper of the workshop moderators, pouring tea and distributing sweet snacks. The moderators immediately dismissed my silence, asking me to comment on HIV/AIDS training and advocacy methods in New York. After the first occasion wherein I expressed my ignorance, I returned home to conduct cursory online research. The following week, the moderators would allot me five to ten minutes to divulge whatever information I had assembled on mothers and children living with HIV and the medical resources available to them through New York's municipal health agencies.

At every moment I expressed my inadequacy in delivering or explaining this information; however, it appeared that this was inconsequential. The brief information sessions were used by the moderators as opportunities for the mothers to feel comfortable with my presence and most certainly my intentions—that, for example, I would fully commit to participation with respect and humility. Once the meetings ended, many of the women would ask me questions about my personal life and my Iranian father. Because I was single (and thus this non-marital status piqued their curiosities concerning my potential marriageability in my 30s), I was asked about potential mates, when I wanted to

¹³⁰ Mansourian's son is my good friend and former classmate in New York.

have children, and future plans once I completed my doctorate. After over a year of mutual acquaintanceship, we warmly greeted one another and catch up.

In September and October 2011 (the last two last months of my time in Tehran) director Mansourian agreed to my personally interviewing the group of mothers for my dissertation project, provided I abide by three conditions. First, the NGO's staff should approve the questions I intended to ask, and second, I should obtain personal permission from each woman.¹³¹ The permissible questions, from the questionnaire I had originally designed,¹³² included questions on perceptions of street mannequins, breastfeeding techniques, and personal philosophies of the body. I also asked questions about access to health services, and the women's familiarity with the terms "taboo," "masculine body" and "feminine body" and if these words had any relevance to them.¹³³

¹³¹ Of the twenty-two questions I would ask other participants for this study, only eight questions were allowed. I also distributed to each person a confidentiality form that explained their rights and a description of my project and credentials.

¹³² This questionnaire, which has approximately thirty questions, was handed out to other participants I interviewed for this dissertation. The question set provided me with an open framework to consult as I followed topical trajectories in our conversations. These questions covered topics of motherhood, health awareness, and breastfeeding practices. For each female participant, I asked, for example, "What is your opinion of your body?" or "In your opinion, what do you imagine or feel about the male or female body?" As a way to both clarify and focus my subject, I asked women about their relationships with their breasts, e.g., through their individual reflections on ideal breast size, body maintenance, intimate encounters, nursing, and as a gendered marker of a female physical form. Because the topic of "breasts" served as the common denominator for all of the women, many of the participants spoke candidly about body satisfaction, breastfeeding, and ideal breast size, to name a few.

¹³³ All interviews took place at the center in Tehran, in a private room adjacent to the meeting room on the third floor. The interviews varied in length, depending on how extensive or descriptive each person chose to respond to the questions. Before each interview, I provided them with a hard copy of the question set. In the beginning of the interview, I allotted time to explain my research project, intentions, and interview format. Then I asked each participant her preference in conducting the interviews—between writing down or recording their answers. For both options, I promised to disguise their names and identities. For each interview, I was not permitted to write down any of their names and responses. I was however allowed to record the interviews, provided that I would quickly transcribe them and erase them within one week. I obliged their wishes and the current translations offer my best attempts at describing, idiomatically, how each person responded in the equivalent level of Persian she spoke. This means that colloquial expressions are often uttered, along with responses that do not appear to be grammatically sound. Their translations in English reflect these idiosyncrasies and cadences.

There were a number of questions I was not permitted to ask. I was not allowed to ask about words pertaining to nudity or even the means they use to gather information about their bodies. Moreover, any direct questions about the relationship between bodies and politics was not permitted. I was also not authorized to ask any questions about underwear —specifically about brassieres and breasts. These topics were deemed too personal and could potentially embarrass women who were not comfortable speaking about such topics to family members, let alone strange researchers. However I was encouraged by the director to speak about motherhood and breastfeeding. One of the staff members informed me that such topics would be well received by the group, as it would enable them to speak more about their experience as mothers.

Last of all (and perhaps the most important) condition was that I would agree to not dramatize their HIV-positive status —meaning I would not focus my questions on them having HIV. Although Mansourian knew the general concept of my thesis and about the interviews I had conducted in the past, he wanted to be certain about my treatment and analysis of them. He reasoned that HIV should not be an isolated characteristic of their lives and experiences, and thus I should not sensationalize the disease during our interviews. (“You should speak to them just as you would speak to someone who has diabetes, cancer, or a common cold —humanely, just as you treat your sister or your mother,” he once said to me.) If the women themselves felt inclined to bring up the disease in conversation, and a conversation would ensue about something HIV-related, then it was their prerogative and permissible. I agreed to observe all three conditions and, moreover, I agreed to not ask questions about their illness.

One week in advance of conducting any interviews, Mansourian and the seminar moderator F. Salehi informed the participants that I intended to conduct confidential, voluntary interviews over the next few weeks in late August until late September 2011. Of the sixteen participants from *Madaran-e Hami-ye Salamat*, I spoke with nine women from the group, followed by interviews with four female members of the staff. (I speak in depth about the participants in the following section.)

In the next section, I provide segments of individual commentaries from four different HIV-positive women from *Madaran-e Hami-ye Salamat*. Although I interviewed nine women in total from this group, I include the reflections of four women specifically for the diversity of responses on the subjects of motherhood, marriage, sexuality, modesty, womanhood, and, whenever they broached the subject themselves, living with HIV. Though I did not initiate discussion about their health status, I found that the participants, of their own accord, provided answers that naturally covered some of these impermissible topics. When I asked them about how satisfied they were with their bodies, for example, some mentioned taking better care of their bodies since being their diagnosis.

By conversing with them, my intention was to learn more about their perspectives on health, their self-confidence in relation to their bodies, and what they envisioned or thought about women's bodies as a general concept. Essentially, how do they overcome being and feeling socially stigmatized? Do their experiences and reflections counter state and clerical opinions about HIV-positive women—their roles, communities, health status, and lifestyles?

After the interviews, I began the transcription process, listening intently to the women's reflections on their personal relationships, medical care, and support networks. To the best of my abilities, I attempted to understand them on their own terms, while I also sorted through and questioned any interferences, preconceptions, and misconceptions of my own that I held before, during, and after the interviews. In each interview, there are interspersing moments of conciliation and despair; of curiosity and indignation; of contradiction and consistency. In the interstitial spaces of these accounts, I observed many simultaneous emotions of turmoil and contentment, manifest in tears being shed and in some cases, in smiles and laughter. The responses were often uttered without direction, as each woman moved in and out of topics, describing one feeling and then immediately abandoning this description in order to comment a new or different sensation, emotion, thought, and image.¹³⁴

In what follows, I present brief biographies of four women, followed by three thematic sections, which elaborate different leitmotifs that emerged during our conversations about their perceptions.

Introducing Farah, Maryam, Masoumeh, and Akram

For thirty-year old Farah, HIV was “an additional virus that I have compared to others; it's like a guest, and I think of it as if I am its host.”¹³⁵ Tehran-born and raised, she was college-educated, having obtained her Associates degree in Persian literature, At the time of our interview, she was working as a seamstress and sold her handicrafts

¹³⁴ When this happened, I quote them in their entirety and thus only submit bracketed comments to help the reader better understand the context of their speech and story.

¹³⁵ Farah (alias), interview by author, personal interview, Tehran, September 5, 2011.

through neighborhood networks. She had not disclosed her diagnosis to any family members, and yet she was an active participant in SPASDI's public awareness teach-ins. She discovered she was HIV-positive mid-way through her first pregnancy, after her husband, a hemophiliac, became HIV-positive as a result of a HIV-contaminated blood in a blood transfusion.

Originally from Shiraz, forty-nine-year old Maryam was one of two childless widows from the group. A steady participant, she always arrived on time and was often one of the last women to leave the meetings. Single and living alone in a small Tehran flat, she had no profession and considered herself poor. Maryam was a self-proclaimed tomboy and is not a practicing Muslim. She was a vocal participant in group workshops, offering her opinions about films and quietly debating with the group moderators. She had a distinct sporty style of dress and was known for her throaty voice —likely the result of years of cigarette smoke. In our conversations, she admitted to past indiscretions, especially during the period of her life when she was addicted to injecting the intravenous drug *shisheh* or “glass” (the colloquial terms in Persian and English for crystal methamphetamine). Raised in a family of boys, Maryam spoke of emulating their freedom; she hung out late and interacted with new people whom she found exciting in her youth. Unlike her female cousins, who pursued education and marriage with ordinary men, she socialized with a “rough crowd” and wanted to “date a lot.” When she fell into drugs, she lied and stole to preserve her habit. After losing a husband to AIDS-related complications, she has been sober for almost a decade. She had been attending *Madaran-e Hami-ye Salamat* for almost a year.

Tall, bespectacled, and willowy Masoumeh resided in Karaj.¹³⁶ Originally from Kashan, she raised her two teenage sons with the help of family members. At age forty-one, she became a single mother after her husband died from an HIV-related illness. A former wearer of the *chador*, she said that her decision to give up the this kind of veil was the result of her worsening eyesight, which compromised her mobility. After more than a year, I became the most acquainted with Masoumeh for she consistently attended group meetings and was ostensibly the most loquacious, doling out advice and telling anecdotes about raising her sons, her *sigheh* (temporary marriage) partnerships, HIV treatment bureaucracy, cooking, among many other topics. When the mothers were reticent to speak, the director and moderators often turned to Masoumeh to jump-start group discussion. At other times, she volunteered to lead conversation and then encouraged other women to participate. In our conversations, she was the only woman who made no mention of her HIV-status, a point I will reflect on later in this section.

Lastly, there was *chador*-wearing Akram, a Kermanshah resident, who traveled to Tehran using various forms of transportation to make it to the center on time. Her children were often in tow, and SPASDI's volunteers watched them as she participated in group discussions. Among the four women, she was the most recent widow, after her second husband—a drug addict and former prisoner who died from AIDS—passed away three months before our interview. Akram, in her thirties, said she is a member of the lower-lower economic class. Her attendance at SPASDI was based, in part, on her need for financial support, as she had no profession and worked at home. She had two children, a daughter and son from two marriages that were, in her words, not easy

¹³⁶ Masoumeh (alias), interview by author, personal interview, Tehran, September 4, 2011.

relationships. Akram was the only interviewee to not respond to any questions regarding her perceptions of men and their bodies. "I have no good opinions of men," she said.

Breastfeeding HIV-negative Babies? The Desires and Pressures of Motherhood

"Motherhood as experience and institution," writes Linda Blum, "continually re-creates the core paradox and core ambivalence that being "from the mother half of humanity" poses for all women."¹³⁷ When a woman becomes a mother, she is confronted by numerous expectations of her purpose and role, and especially she encounters pressure to feed her child human milk. Researchers have studied various aspects of motherhood experiences, theorizing the maternal role as a learned or an intuitive process. Reva Rubin posited that the maternal role was interactive, reciprocal, and social and acquired through the process of "maternal role attainment." With the birth of each child and the special needs accompanying his or her development, a woman builds on her maternal experience and acquires a new sense of self through her maternal identity.¹³⁸ Ramona Mercer, further developing Rubin's theory, argues that the mothering role actually involves multiple processes of "becoming a mother." When a woman has a successful breastfeeding experience, she learns to feel competent about her caretaking tasks and

¹³⁷ Linda Blum, "Mothers, Babies, and Breastfeeding in Late Capitalist America: The Shifting Contexts of Feminist Theory," *Feminist Studies* 19, no. 2 (Summer 1993): p. 290.

¹³⁸ Reva Rubin, "Attainment of the Maternal Role. Part 1: Processes," *Nursing Research* 16 (Summer/Fall 1967): pp. 237-265.

mothering abilities.¹³⁹ Maternal confidence is linked not only to breastfeeding itself, but also to its duration.¹⁴⁰

The issue that breastfeeding is a normalized moral imperative of mothering is hotly debated by scholars.¹⁴¹ The literature on the many wrong, right, or natural ways and styles of breastfeeding is countless.¹⁴² A point of congruence within this literature is that a mother breastfeeding her child is deemed a natural activity for nourishing a child, often preventing disease, lowering health costs, and promoting bonding between mother and infant. Despite the ubiquity and necessity of breastfeeding to human development, there are very few qualitative studies that focus on breastfeeding practices in nominally Muslim countries like Iran, where maternal-child nursing is considered an important factor in defining Islamic revolutionary ideals of motherhood, adjudicating monetary compensation during divorce cases, and in designating spousal responsibilities during marriage.¹⁴³ The coercion to mother (through the activity of breastfeeding) is essential to

¹³⁹ See Ramona Mercer, *Becoming a Mother: Research on Maternal Identity from Rubin to the Present* (New York: Springer, 1995).

¹⁴⁰ Blum, "Mothers, Babies, and Breastfeeding in Late Capitalist America: The Shifting Contexts of Feminist Theory," p. 291.

¹⁴¹ Ibid.

¹⁴² On breastfeeding practices and motherhood roles, I consulted the following sources: Cindy A. Stearns, "Breastfeeding and the Good Maternal Body," *Gender and Society* 13, no. 3 (June 1999): pp. 308-325; Sharon Hays, *The Cultural Contradictions of Motherhood* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1996); Pam Carter, *Feminism, Breasts and Breast-Feeding* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1995); Rima Apple, *Mothers & Medicine: A Social History of Infant Feeding 1890-1950* (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1987).

¹⁴³ Firoozeh Kashani-Sabet has studied breastfeeding policies in relation to the maternalist discourse of the first four decades of the Pahlavi regime. Kashani-Sabet researched changing midwifery and hygienic practices, looking at maternalist endorsements of breastfeeding using Islamic and local traditions to promote health children in antiseptic conditions. Iran's support of hygienic reforms came at a pivotal time when the women's movement was in its burgeoning stage. See Firoozeh Kashani-Sabet, "The Politics of Reproduction: Maternalism and Women's Hygiene in Iran, 1896-1941," *International Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 38 (2006): pp. 1-29. Also, Avner Giladi has written about medieval Islamic views of breastfeeding. Giladi studied *Qur'anic* commentaries, legal texts, and medical texts on medieval breastfeeding perceptions and noted that nursing between a mother and child created much more than a

pronatalist family planning policies and cultural practices in Iran, where mother-centered descriptions of women are presented in state and religious discourses as central values upheld by the majority of Iranian citizens.

The dearth of qualitative research on maternal identity through the personal experiences of Iranian women are what inspired me to learn more about individual perceptions of childrearing, health, and body image through the complex issue of breastfeeding in Iran.¹⁴⁴

I was particularly interested in hearing about women's breastfeeding experiences, as these individual stories illuminated the processes of negotiation and identity formation in the face of family and maternal pressures, religious restrictions, and precarious support systems. A woman's decision to breastfeed is often intensely personal and dependent on life circumstances.¹⁴⁵ In many societies, moral scrutiny and shame factor equally into this decision to nurse her child.¹⁴⁶ Moreover, cultural mandates dictate "if, when, where, and how long a child will receive human milk," surmises J. Stolzer.¹⁴⁷ For many HIV-positive women, the decision to reproduce presents a moral dilemma. In cases when HIV-positive

biological connection. It was commonly held that personality traits were being transferred between breast-provider and suckling child. Giladi also researched Islamic milk kinship laws, which forbid marriage between females (and their offspring) and non-biological children they breastfed. See Avner Giladi, *Infants, Parents and Wet Nurses: Medieval Islamic Views on Breastfeeding and their Social Implications* (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 1999).

¹⁴⁴ Gabrielle Palmer wrote the seminal book *The Politics of Breastfeeding* on the politicization of breastfeeding in western countries. She argues that the decline of breastfeeding practices from the 1940s to 1970s was a result of the collusion between the medical profession and breast milk-substitute corporations, who encouraged women to use formula in lieu of breastfeeding. See Gabrielle Palmer, *The Politics of Breastfeeding* (London: Pandora Press, 1988).

¹⁴⁵ Blum, p. 297.

¹⁴⁶ Dia Michels and Naomi Baumslag, *Milk, Money, and Madness: The Culture and Politics of Breastfeeding* (Westport: Bergen & Garvey Trade, 1995), p. 6.

¹⁴⁷ J. Stolzer, "Breastfeeding: An Interdisciplinary Review," *International Review of Modern Sociology* 32, no. 1 (Spring 2006): p. 109.

women become mothers, for many women, the following question arises: should she breastfeed knowing that the child might contract the virus —is it ethically and morally responsible?

For women living with HIV, compounding social and public forces, in addition to health factors that might bear significant consequences for their children, influence their reproductive decisions.¹⁴⁸ HIV-positive women can generally bear children, however certain steps must be taken to reduce the possibility of the child contracting HIV to less than one percent. Breastfeeding in particular carries many risks. Nearly one-third of infants born to HIV-infected mothers will contract the virus.¹⁴⁹ UNICEF warns, “The longer a child is breastfed by an HIV mother, the higher the risk of HIV infection. Breastfeeding for six months has about one third of the risk of breastfeeding for two years.”¹⁵⁰ HIV-positive women are recommended to follow preventive interventions — such as antiretroviral therapy, delivering the child by Cesarean section, and *not* breastfeeding. If breastfeeding is conducted then health experts estimate that between 10 to 20 percent of children will contract HIV.¹⁵¹

I spoke with Farah one year before she became pregnant with her second child. In our conversations, she emphasized a desire to become pregnant again, to possibly breastfeed, and to have two healthy children. For Farah, the subject of breastfeeding was

¹⁴⁸ DB Barnes, “Reproductive Decisions for Women with HIV: Motherhood’s Role in Envisioning a Future,” *Qualitative Health Research Journal* 19, no. 4 (April 2009): pp. 481-491.

¹⁴⁹ “*HIV and Infant Feeding: The Facts*,” UNICEF (New York: UNICEF, 2002), p. 2.

¹⁵⁰ See “Infant feeding and HIV: Risks and Benefits of Breastfeeding,” UNICEF (New York: UNICEF, 2002), accessed April 12, 2012, http://www.unicef.org/nutrition/23964_infantfeeding.html.

¹⁵¹ See Mark Cichocki, *Living with HIV: A Patient’s Guide* (North Carolina: McFarland & Company, Inc., 2009); “HIV Facts: The Basics,” National AIDS Trust, 2012, accessed April 20, 2012, <http://www.nat.org.uk/HIV-Facts/The-basics.aspx>.

a deeply personal issue. When I asked her about breastfeeding, knowing that the potential for exposure of her baby to HIV was high, Farah recalled:

I found out mid-pregnancy that I was HIV-positive . . . My doctor advised me to not breastfeed. And when I gave birth after a C-section, my breasts were filled with milk. After two or three days, I became so upset. My doctor again said not to breastfeed, and to place ice on my breasts so that the milk would stop. This feeling was so upsetting. I went into the shower and cried, holding the ice to my chest, and thinking, ‘Oh God, I don’t know what the solution is, my breasts are so heavy with milk, and I’m not allowed to breastfeed.’ And now when I see someone giving milk to her child, my heart just aches...I also think being a woman--maybe this is a really traditional way of thinking, or old-fashioned-- but this thought comes to me that woman and womanhood, a woman’s entire value is giving birth, breastfeeding, raising children...these are all valuable for women. When I couldn’t do this, I thought any mother would do anything for her child, and I haven’t done this..But then, when I feel this way, I think it’s more valuable that my child is healthy and HIV negative.¹⁵²

The following summer I saw Farah again; she was glowing, fully six months pregnant.

When I asked her if she was excited about giving birth, she beamed, and said that she hoped the baby would be born healthy.

Farah’s situation was exceptional. For the majority of the women who became HIV-positive after bearing children, they no longer considered breastfeeding an option because of the increased chances of transferring the virus to their children. Of the nine interviewees, two were married, and only Farah had expressed a wish to expand her family. The remaining women expressed little interest in remarriage (save one woman who has *sigheh* partnerships); as single mothers, some of them explained that they struggled to provide for the children they already had. However, despite an apparent ambivalence towards future breastfeeding, the mothers responded positively to my

¹⁵² I try to quote the interviewees’ comments as they are expressed. However, for the purposes of clarification, I would ask additional questions; these interjections are noted through italicized phrases which I parenthesize.

question about breastfeeding practices. They spoke extensively about their experiential knowledge of nursing, discussing aspects of childrearing, family dynamics, and personal traditions and customs they often attributed to religious belief and family custom.

For this particular group, exclusive breastfeeding was the preferred choice for at least the first year of their children's lives.¹⁵³ The women's individual descriptions of nursing their children impart moments of tender tactility and of relaxation between mother and child. One woman in particular relayed with excitement that she once breastfed her sister's child, after obtaining permission from her husband.¹⁵⁴ While describing feelings of maternal connection during breastfeeding, they made associations between maternal experience and a woman's self-worth. Of the women who had breastfed, breastfeeding was described as a method of ensuring not only the health and peace of their child, but also as an activity that fulfilled certain maternal and familial obligations. The concept of breastfeeding became a key demarcation point between how certain women conceptualized their bodies in conflict with their personal desires, family traditions, and what they perceived as distinct religious and/or cultural traditions and values.

¹⁵³ Exclusive breastfeeding is defined as providing only breast milk to the baby from birth. MOHME suggests that a mother breastfeed for at least six months. "Nokat-e Mohem darbare-ye Shir Dadan/Important Points about Breastfeeding," MOHME, <http://bzhc.qums.behdasht.gov.ir/index.aspx?siteid=183&pageid=31393&pro=nobak>, accessed May 13, 2012. According to Olang et. al 2009 study, "At a national level, 90% and 57% of infants [in Iran] were breastfed at one and two-years of age, respectively. Exclusive breastfeeding rates at 4 and 6 months of age at national level averaged 56.8% and 27.7%. Exclusive breastfeeding rates at 4 and 6 months of age in rural areas were 58% and 29%, and in urban areas 56% and 27%, respectively." See Olang et. al, "Breastfeeding in Iran: Prevalence, Duration and Current Recommendations," *International Breastfeeding Journal* 4, no. 8 (2009), doi:10.1186/1746-4358-4-8.

¹⁵⁴ In Islamic legal terminology, breastfeeding or suckling is known by the technical term *rada* or *rida*, an act that produces the legal impediment to marriage of foster-kinship (meaning any female and her blood relatives are forbidden from marriage with the unrelated child she suckled). In Iran, suckling produces an automatic biological relationship through milk, known as milk kinship or *rezaii* in Persian. (A mother who breastfeeds a non-biological child is known as a *madar-e rezaii*.) See Peter Parkes, "Milk Kinship in Islam. Substance, Structure, History," *Social Anthropology* 13, no. 3 (2005): pp. 307-329.

A conversation with Masoumeh reminded me that there were many factors contributing to the complex social meanings of breastfeeding in Iran. I had asked Masoumeh about her body satisfaction. She giggled, and interpreted the question as a moment for her to comment on her physical appearance. Masoumeh mentioned her breast size, which she found “very small.” When I asked her about breastfeeding experiences, she told me, “When I breastfed, [my breasts] were big and good.” I asked if she could recall how she felt while she breastfed, and Masoumeh immediately smiled.

“Breastfeeding gave me such pleasure, when I held my child in my arms, it gave me such a unique feeling and sensation,” Masoumeh reminisced. I then inquired about the length of time she breastfed, and her response was precise: “Two years completely, each child [for] two years.” When I ask her reasons for breastfeeding for this period, she replies, “Because it’s the law, they say that children should be breastfed. Girls should be nursed at least one year and ten months and boys two years and two months...I heard this from my mom, from my [extended] family, for example.” I ask specifically if this “law” is officially in the civil code or a cultural norm; she says it is the latter.

In most of the interviews, I heard the standard response of nearly two years for the duration each woman nurses—it appeared that any time less than this number would compromise the health of the child.¹⁵⁵ Of course, not all of the women breastfed for this duration, though when such was the case, four of the women expressed regret in the form of “I breastfed one year and seven months, but should have breastfed two years.”¹⁵⁶

¹⁵⁵ Three women mention additional support from public advertisements, television and radio broadcasts, and medical advice from physicians.

¹⁵⁶ This comment is made by another female participant from SPASDI whose narrative I chose not to highlight.

Because I heard repeated answers of two years, I became curious about the origin and authoritative sources of this number, especially how particular woman used it as a marker of empowerment. When I inquired about its origins, only one of the nine women responded that it signified the length of time the Prophet Muhammad, as a newborn, was breastfed by Halimeh, his *dayeh* or wet nurse.¹⁵⁷ This *hadith* source for breastfeeding was not commonly known in this group, however there was a general understanding that women should customarily nurse for two years —irrespective of where this advice originated (meaning from elders, family members, peers, or from religious sources).

Iran's maternalist policies underscore breastfeeding as a primary biological activity of women that fulfills their ideal obligations and responsibilities in accordance with gender and family roles outlined in Shi'a Islamic tradition.¹⁵⁸ Religious treatises (*resaleh*) of Shi'a Grand Ayatollahs (*marja' e taqlid* or sources of emulation) are rife with

¹⁵⁷ According to the *Encyclopedia of Islam*, suckling is mentioned in the *Qur'an*'s Sura IV: 23, Sura II: 233, and *sunna*. Mothers are advised to breastfeed their babies for a complete course of two years, with a minimum of six months to ensure child's survival. However the same verse considers breastfeeding as the decision of the mother and father. *Encyclopedia of Islam*, Second Edition, *rada* or *rida*, accessed May 25, 2012, http://referenceworks.brillonline.com.ezproxy.cul.columbia.edu/entries/encyclopaedia-of-islam-2/rada-or-rida-COM_0896?s.num=0&s.f.s2_parent=s.f.book.encyclopaedia-of-islam-2&s.q=breast-feeding. According to a common recollection of this story, Muhammad was later returned to his mother Amina after two years of being suckled. Avner Giladi argues that the two-year period was generally interpreted within the context of divorce. See Giladi, *Infants, Parents and Wet Nurses*, pp. 18-20.

¹⁵⁸ Though burdened by space limitations, I quickly offer a summary (which I will discuss at length in my dissertation) of the Islamic revolutionary discourse's conceptualization and emphasis of the role of Muslims, Iranian women. This has already been well established through the legal, political, and societal manifestation of a patriarchal logic in which women's individuality, independence and autonomy were largely downplayed. (Scholar Azadeh Kian-Thiebaut has described this ideology as having "denied" these three features.) Much of the rhetoric about female empowerment is taken from *shari'a* legal understandings of matrimonial harmony, in which women are associated with familial roles and their main functions within the family are to provide "childbearing, child-rearing and housework," says Kian-Thiebaut. Moreover, through the characterization of certain revolutionary women religious figures, such as Zeynab and Fatimeh, Islamist ideologues have drawn an additional framework in which Iranian women are encouraged and believed to embody and perform these roles. By way of extending national pride to the self-sacrificing, religiously observant mother, IRI has spent the past thirty years producing a variety of social programs that highlight these symbolic, nationalist prototypes for its women citizens. Yet, clearly many Iranian women —across a wide spectrum of disparate religious, political affiliations and concerns— have come to challenge and re-configure these prescriptive roles through their activism, local knowledges, university education, rising literacy rates, independent, religious training and civic and/or political participation. See Mir-Hosseini (1999; 2001); Kian-Thiebaut (2002); Ahmed (1993).

extensive commentaries on breastfeeding practices and the financial compensation afforded to wives and mothers in cases of divorce.¹⁵⁹ Even Iran's personal status laws reflect the importance of breastfeeding in the preservation of Muslim families; women are granted the legal right of financial maintenance for the length of time they breastfeed their children during marriage.¹⁶⁰

During and immediately after the Iran-Iraq war, MOHME (at the time known only as the Ministry of Health) began campaigning against formula use, integrating references of Islamic religious tradition to promote the state's family planning policies. Wartime rationing raised the price of formula once the government limited imports of formula, and for many years, it was not for sale to the general public.¹⁶¹ Through promotional pamphlets distributed in health clinics and mosques, "Breast is Best"-type advertisements informed Iranian mothers of the superiority of breastfeeding because the *Qur'an* recommends it for the health of the child.¹⁶² Editorial pieces in women's journals like *Zan-e Rouz* discussed the nutritional risks of *shir-e khoshk* (dry-milk or formula). In one particular article, formula was described as a product heralding a consumerist lifestyle; this was a direct censure of the Pahlavi dynasty (1925-1979), whose favorable reception and advertisement of Western commercial goods helped promote

¹⁵⁹ *Touzi al-Masa'el* of Grand Ayatollahs Khomeini (d. 1989), Hossein-Ali Montazeri (d. 2009), Naser Makaram Shirazi, and Yousef Saanei, who individually comment on breastfeeding practices in a section entitled "*Ahkham-e Shir-dadan*" (Rules on Breastfeeding).

¹⁶⁰ See Islamic Republic of Iran Judiciary, Family Law, *Qanoun-e Tarvij-e Taghziye ba Shir-e Madar va Hemayat az Madaran dar Doran-e Shirdehi/Law Encouraging Breastfeeding and the Protection of Mothers during Breastfeeding*, 1374 Azar 22 (Tehran: Ganjdanesh Publishing, 1385/2006), pp. 295-298. Additionally, a breastfeeding mother should be financially compensated by her husband, even if they are divorced.

¹⁶¹ Mohsen Maddah, "Breastfeeding Rates in Iran: Why is There Such a Large Gap between Iran and Other Countries," *Journal of Human Lactation* 24, no. 149 (April 2008), doi: 10.1177/0890334408316087.

¹⁶² Carla Makhoul Obermeyer, "Reproductive Choice in Islam: Gender and State in Iran and Tunisia," *Studies in Family Planning* 25, no. 1 (Jan.-Feb. 1994): p. 47.

modernization and westernization to Iranians.¹⁶³ The state's efforts to reduce formula usage came on the heels of WHO and UNICEF joint efforts to prevent malnutrition in infants and young children by "regulating inappropriate sales promotion of infant foods that can be used to replace breast milk."¹⁶⁴

By 1991, domestic breastfeeding policy was elevated in national importance through MOHME's establishment of the National Committee of Breastfeeding Promotion. The committee began producing booklets, pamphlets, compact discs, and workshops, in an effort to prevent infant morbidity and improve infant health.¹⁶⁵ MOHME designated hospitals as "baby friendly"¹⁶⁶ through the *Tarh-e Bimarestan-e Doostdar-e Koudak* (Baby Friendly Hospital Initiative), and in each of Iran's provinces, the ministry set up a health network with a breastfeeding committee. In 1995, Iran's Parliament ratified a law entitled, "Promoting Breast-feeding and Supporting Mothers During the Nursing Period," whereby the import of any form of dried milk or supplementary nutrition for infants was allowed only with the government's permission,

¹⁶³ "Zarourat-e Taghziye ba Shir-e Madar va Dalil-e Afzayesh-e Biraviye-ye Masraf-e Shir-e Khoshk/ The Necessity of Nourishing from Breast-milk and the Reason for Irregular Increases in Formula Consumption," *Zan-e Rouz*, Issue 748, 21 Dey 1358/January 11, 1980, pp. 38-39, 42. See also "Shir-e Madar, Sarshar az Vitamin/ Breast-milk, Vitamin-Rich," *Zan-e Rouz*, Issue 1117, Ordibehesht 1366/ May 16, 1987, pp. 12-13, 26.

¹⁶⁴ Resolution WHA31.47, *Handbook of Resolutions and Decisions of the World Health Assembly and the Executive Board*, vol. 2 (Geneva, 1981), p. 62. The World Health Assembly (WHA), in 1974 and 1980 recommended establishing "an international code of marketing of infant formula and other products used as breast-milk substitutes." See *International Code of Marketing of Breast-milk Substitutes*, WHO (Geneva: World Health Organization, 1981), p. 5.

¹⁶⁵ See Olang, et al., "Breastfeeding in Iran: Prevalence, Duration, and Current Recommendations."

¹⁶⁶ "Baby friendly" is the rough translation of *doostdar-e koudak*.

and in limited cases.¹⁶⁷ Almost a decade later, in 2004, MOHME reevaluated its breastfeeding mission, and health officials increased efforts to promote breastfeeding in order to reduce growth abnormalities, to decrease the morality rate, and to increase the number of “baby friendly hospitals.”¹⁶⁸

In the past three decades of breastfeeding advocacy and policy in Iran, the subject of breastfeeding practice has been integrated into the ideological rhetoric of the Revolution and has factored in the construction of a healthy, morally guided Islamic state. At different historical moments, breastfeeding is encouraged not only as the responsibility of Muslim mothers, but also as *the* method by which to ensure the survival of their children. Especially during wartime, formula usage is politicized and discouraged. Given the extensive policy initiatives to promote breastfeeding, emphasized through religious and political rhetoric, breastfeeding cannot be viewed as simply an endearing engagement between mother and child. As the following interviews will demonstrate, for the majority of women, nursing a child was an essential rite-of-passage marking their transition into a particular maternal, familial, and in some cases, religious community. The coercion to mother and thus breastfeed were articulated and reinforced by the state as cultural and religious norms.

Yet national policies on breastfeeding promoting ideal maternal responsibilities for women did not quell the social pressures that many Iranian women faced, such as looking and feeling physically desirable during and after breastfeeding. Most of the women

¹⁶⁷ Also, only pharmacies could distribute formula or dried milk. (This policy, however, is not strictly enforced as formula can be easily found at corner stores.) Quoted in “Shirin Ebadi Book Excerpts,” *BadJens Iranian Feminist Newsletter*, September 2004, accessed June 1, 2012, <http://www.badjens.com/ebadi.html>. Original source from Shirin Ebadi, *Women’s Rights in the Laws of the Islamic Republic of Iran*.

¹⁶⁸ See Olang et al., “Breastfeeding in Iran: Prevalence, Duration, and Current Recommendations.”

mentioned this concern in their interviews, yet among this particular group, six women stated that their decisions to breastfeed reflected how they prioritized their children's health over maintaining their physical appearance. They believed that metropolitan women were more concerned about achieving a perfect body — by metropolitan, they meant women from Tehran and/or women influenced by fashion trends. Interestingly, most of the women acknowledged that the pressures to maintain perfect, round breasts which did not sag and thus appeared firm underneath their *manteau*, were important concerns for women of Tehran.¹⁶⁹ Three women whom I interviewed claimed that this particular demographic preferred using formula. (However, they also responded that this perception was gaining popularity for women in the provinces.) Both Masoumeh and Farah mentioned that when a woman denied her breastfeeding responsibility for the sake of less consequential concerns —such as time management and maintaining perfect breast form— the baby's health would be jeopardized.

According to some of these women, deciding not to breastfeed meant that a woman had rebuffed her obligatory, maternal duties —an act that would potentially blemish a family's reputation. Furthermore, avoiding breastfeeding was considered a potentially dishonorable act against family tradition and advice.

Yet among the nine women, one woman in particular stated that nursing was a personal choice. When I asked her if it was every woman's responsibility to breastfeed, Akram responded,

No, not now. In the past, when women wouldn't breastfeed, they would call her

¹⁶⁹ Government campaigns have promoted exclusive breastfeeding in both rural and urban areas. See Makhoul Obermeyer, "Reproductive Choice in Islam: Gender and State in Iran and Tunisia" about breastfeeding national policy.

lazy. But a woman who would breastfeed, they would call her active. Nowadays it's just formula. Nobody breastfeeds that much anymore... Because nowadays they say, our breasts will droop, our bodies will be ruined, we'll be ruined. (*Does this happen more in Tehran or in shahrestan?*) Yes, the provinces are becoming that way, too. I have a relative that gave birth to two sets of twins. And she didn't breastfeed any of them. She said, 'I can't breastfeed. I'll give them formula, and I'm comfortable with that. I don't want my breasts to droop... I didn't have a natural delivery, I had a Caesarean because I wanted that [vagina] area to be in tact.' Science is progressing and their minds are becoming better.

In this passage, Akram's comments germane to her relative's decision on breastfeeding convey her ambivalence. Unlike Farah and Masoumeh, Akram was generally accepting of divergent viewpoints regarding a mother's responsibilities towards her children. For her, breastfeeding was not obligatory of women; more so, choosing not to breastfeed did not represent a particular ineptitude or poor decision-making on the woman's part. Rather than expressing negativity or judgment about her relative's decision, Akram instead spoke about it, matter-of-factly. To her, breastfeeding was dependent on variables of time, shifting priorities, and social circumstances.

In many respects, the politicization of breastfeeding discourse in Iran can be read conceptually as a pronatalist regulatory technique of corporeal inscription on Iranian women's bodies. Corporeal inscription has been invoked in feminist critique of compulsory *hejab*.¹⁷⁰ Just as "makeup, stilettos, bras, hair sprays, clothing, underclothing mark women's bodies," the veil (within Iran's sociohistorical context) has been interpreted by scholars Minoo Moallem and Hamideh Sedghi, as a "corporeal inscription of citizenship [putting] in place a system of signs that delegitimizes and even

¹⁷⁰ In much of the literature on corporeal citizenship in Iranian studies, scholars emphasize the different historic episodes of veiling ordinances throughout Iran's modern history. As many scholarly works have attested, the concept of the veil became an immediate marker of the politicized female body. In 1935 to 1936, compulsory unveiling became legally enforced under Reza Shah Pahlavi, then it was eased under his son Mohammad Reza Shah Pahlavi. Ayatollah Khomeini's establishment of the Islamic Republic in 1979 saw within the first two years, compulsory veiling being instituted for all Iranian women. In several analyses of state policies on veiling in academic (and feminist) discourse, the veil is treated as a conceptual and material mode of corporeal inscription.

criminalizes certain bodies.”¹⁷¹ “In the post-revolutionary state,” remarks Moallem, “the law, which was exercised externally, became internalized as the essence of the female body.”¹⁷² This particular explanation of the corporeal inscription of women’s bodies can be extended to this discussion of women’s breastfeeding experiences in Iran. In some respect, breastfeeding becomes another method by which to internalize positive ideals about health, family, and faith, which are also emphasized in *Qur’anic* and *hadith* narratives. By questioning how these values are being articulated and reinforced, I am questioning the presumption of a maternal “truth” manifest in nursing children. Moreover,

What should be treated as a general encouragement to breastfeed for the health of a child is in fact expressed as an expectation for women to nurse. This pressure can have a disciplinary effect on women, influencing their decisions to breastfeed out of responsibility to their family and faith. As many of these interviews demonstrated, breastfeeding is mired in many presumptions about what a good mother and woman should do for her baby. For many of these women, they understood breastfeeding to be an expression of a cultural, economic, familial, and political norm accepted by the majority of Muslim-Iranian women. However, the consequences of these normative assumptions place a burden on Iranian women who, by virtue of their HIV-positive status, could place their children in danger if they do decide to breastfeed. These interviews have led me to ask, rhetorically: Do Iran’s state and religious discourses on motherhood, which encourage women to breastfeed, place an inordinate pressure on HIV-positive women to fulfill ideal motherhood roles? More so, could this be viewed as

¹⁷¹ Moallem, *Between Warrior Brother and Veiled Sister*, p. 73.

¹⁷² Ibid.

an irresponsible health policy that may have potentially damaging results for public health?

Maryam and Getting It Straight

At SPASDI, the group moderators often integrated popular culture to explore certain themes in a directly visual manner. I attended many of the seminars when guest speakers like dentists, nutritionists, and social workers would play cartoon films or appeal to Iranian television characters to elucidate problem-solving techniques to deal with common problems to this group, such as drug addiction, recidivism, and the immune system. When the dramedy *Tasviah Hesab*¹⁷³ was shown—an Iranian comedy about four female ex-convicts and their get-rich-quick schemes—Maryam became the most animated when critiquing the film’s portrayal of prison realities and criminality. “Prison doesn’t rehabilitate,” she surmised, insisting that people should spend more time discussing the reasons why criminal acts are committed. During group discussion, she pointed to the deep emotional scars of some of the characters with whom she empathizes.

Personal conversations with Maryam were often the best occasions to see her dynamic personality and the depth of experience and wisdom with which she spoke. When I asked Maryam if she was satisfied with her body, Maryam smiled and said, “I’m very satisfied with the way I look for someone my age.” Then she recalled an anecdote in which strangers had mistaken her for being a sports coach (she dressed frequently in

¹⁷³ Filmed in 2007, *Tasviah Hesab* follows the scams of ringleader Ziba and her three associates who kidnap unsuspecting male drivers. The women wear various attractive disguises and await men to approach them for presumably a free lift or potential intimate encounters. The men are held at gunpoint and taken to an empty doctor’s residence, where they are tortured and drugged. In a hallucinogenic stupor, they agree to treat women fairly while they are being extorted. Meanwhile, the main female characters battle drug addictions, domestic violence, rape, and familial abandonment. One of the main themes of the film concerns women’s attempts to seek moral justice amidst patriarchy and social stigmatization.

Adidas tracksuits). On other occasions, women had approached her in the street, complimenting her on her figure, she said.

During our interviews, I asked her to speak about her perceptions of the concepts of “*badan-e zananeh*” (feminine body) and “*badan-e mardaneh*” (masculine body) as she understood them. Translated from Persian, the aforementioned questions encapsulate two English phrases: “What is a feminine/masculine body?” and “When I say ‘feminine’ or ‘masculine’ body, what do you perceive?” Maryam became confused, and immediately I realized my errors. Not only were these questions not commonly asked, but I also expressed them using peculiar, social science terms. Thereafter I learned to immediately rephrase my questions so that they were better understood by the participants. In my rephrasing of these concepts, I gave five different versions to create an approximate meaning that was both understandable and relatable to my interviewees.¹⁷⁴ After a minute had passed, Maryam responded, “Feminine bodies are *zarif* (delicately crafted).” When I asked her to elaborate, she described an experience she shared with a coterie of friends who were apparently unsatisfied that they could not act freely wearing feminine clothes. As a solution, they preferred to dress in boyish clothing in public—one of the many manifestations of cross-dressing in Iran. Maryam explained,

I have a lot of friends whose style is *pesarane* (like young men) —not that the clothes are boyish, but that their style is like that of young men. That’s not my meaning [exactly]. My meaning is that for me, I’m a little bit like that but not to the extreme. For instance, I always wear boyish t-shirts (clothing for male teenagers). So far I haven’t seen myself wear skirts—even though I have a beautiful figure. (*But those friends that you mentioned? Are they married?*) Yes, they’re married, but they hang out this way! . . . I myself, I don’t wear skirts. Other

¹⁷⁴ For the question, “What is the female body?” I asked the following variants: “What is your conceptualization of a woman’s body?” “How do you imagine a feminine body?” “In your mind, when you think of a woman’s body, what do you imagine?” “What comes to your thoughts when you think of a women’s body?”

than my husband, no one has seen my bare ankles. If you ask why, they say, ‘Oh, it’s not appropriate...’ I say to them, ‘You’re a woman, if your husband sees your ankles, what’s the problem?’ [By dressing this way], although they are women, they want to show that ‘we are not women.’

Maryam elaborated on this group of female friends —themselves former addicts— who chose to wear clothing typically associated with young males in public, which I include in their entirety:

I don’t know what a masculine body is...I saw, even those that are women, and from these [rehabilitation detoxification] camps, they were addicts and became clean. Most of those women, especially the older ones... when you speak to them, most of them say ‘I didn’t want to be a woman; we’re upset being women. We wear boyish clothes mostly because we’re not completely satisfied with being women. We don’t want to go into the street wearing a *maghna’eh*¹⁷⁵ and *manteau*. We wear boyish clothes and hats.

I asked her if she considered any of them to be *hamjensgera* or homosexual. She responded,

No, they’re not *hamjensgera*, but they like that kind of style. *Hamjensgera* are those that are *lez* (lesbians). Even [there were] times I had a conversation with them and they said, from childhood, because when they were younger, our family couldn’t have sons. They would make them look like boys and dress them like boys. And they were raised like that and formed like that... They wear this stretchy material that [she then motions to her breasts, making a pressing motion to demonstrate her wrapping a stretchy material her chest in order to flatten her breasts.] (*Then they go out into the street like this?*) Yes, there are many in Tehran, especially in parks. (*Do you mean they go to Park-e Daneshjou?*)¹⁷⁶ No, these people aren’t into that kind of stuff. They just like to walk around with that kind of style. They say, ‘We’re not comfortable wearing *maghna’eh*.’

¹⁷⁵ The *maghna’eh* is a special headscarf, formed like a hood, that is typically worn in official public spaces, such as government offices. Many women wear this *hejab* underneath a *chador*.

¹⁷⁶ *Park-e Daneshjou* (now University Park and formerly Koroush Park) is located in central Tehran, at ValiAsr Boulevard and Enghelab Street. This particular park has the stereotype that it is frequented by people soliciting gay and straight sex and/or seeking drugs. The park is also home to Tehran’s City Theater, mentioned in Chapter Four.

I inquired further, “Do their faces not look so feminine, meaning do they look like women?” “Of course, it’s obvious [they are women]!” she responded. “They go outside this way. Well, nowadays, girls and boys—even boys pluck their eyebrows.”

According to Maryam, the difference she observed between feminine and masculine bodies was based on her perception of which body could best draw out her confidence. Dressing in young men’s clothing enabled her group of friends to realize a desire to feel a freedom that cannot be actualized by wearing the usual markers of feminine clothing—in this context, a headscarf and *manteau*. While walking in public and dressed in male garb, she noticed the difference in the way they carried themselves, especially when their gender and sex were not obvious. Wearing masculine clothes became a source of self-empowerment and self-confidence, in Maryam’s opinion. Dressing in this manner allowed them to feel mobile and independent and, at least temporarily, their rights to feel and dress as they wished were not impinged upon.

That Maryam was also mistaken for an athlete or young man walking freely in public was uniquely satisfying for her. Implicit in her observations was that these sensations and perceptions were not ones she or her friends readily associated with wearing the *hejab* and *manteau* in public. Notably, Maryam’s attitude about dressing in such a fashion was not associated with any particular sexuality, sexual orientation, or adherence to a particular religious tenet. For her, dressing like a young man afforded her the opportunity to move and act in public with a little more freedom.¹⁷⁷ This anecdote

¹⁷⁷ I hesitate to describe Maryam and her friends’ style of dress as a form of transvestism because I did not conduct enough research about how modes of cross-dressing are expressed and analyzed within the Iranian context. I did however consult certain pieces about cross-dressing and gender performance, namely Judith Butler’s *Gender Trouble: Feminism and Subversion of Identity* and Marjorie Garber’s *Vested Interests: Cross-dressing and Cultural Anxiety*. Garber has written exclusively on the subject of cross-dressing from Renaissance dramas to pop culture icons, Madonna. She critiques feminist literature of transvestites, whose

demonstrates that her feeling of being masculine was made possible through how she dressed her body. How she dressed gave her a momentary gender identity, which she transforms at her choosing and in accordance to her own beliefs.

Also implicit in her comments was the recognition of the privileges afforded to a masculine body—a theme I heard repeatedly in these interviews. These women regularly observed that having the body of a man meant that one could access public space easily and faced less social restrictions. Masoumeh from Kashan, for example, had distinct understandings of what constituted being and looking masculine or feminine. “The body is a body,” she said, “they’re organs, but...you’re asking such a difficult question. A feminine body? It differs from a masculine body.” I asked her to explain more, and she responded, “In terms of reputation, women, in general, I don’t know what to say, they should be covered...Men’s bodies, they walk around with their chests pushed out, it’s not a problem for a man to be *lokht* (naked), well, it’s a man!” (She then stuck out her chest in a boastful manner.) Masoumeh observed that a crucial difference between masculine and feminine bodies was the way that men protruded their chests in public. For her, this act was identifiably masculine body language, whereby men performed their masculine gender through a distinct bodily act. In her opinion, men were also allowed to expose a part of their bodies (which she described as nakedness) —which did not apply to women. In no point of the interview did Masoumeh question why it was that certain acts were acceptable for men yet not for women. Instead, she exclaimed, “They’re men!”

analyses tend to focus too much on the bodies beneath the clothes of cross-dressing men and women. Garber encourages analyses that “read” the transvestite for who s/he is by looking “at” him or her. According to Garber, transvestism is an “enabling fantasy” in which our ways of thinking about identity, self-knowledge, and self-sufficiency are being blurred and destabilized. See Butler, *Gender Trouble* (New York: Routledge, 1999); Garber, *Vested Interests* (New York: Routledge, 1997).

Advice on Respecting the Body and Its Private Parts, in Masoumeh's Words

Masoumeh's enthusiasm was frequently demonstrated in our discussions. When I inquired about her occupation, she replied, "For now, a housewife!" The adverbial expression "for now" was repeated often throughout our conversation. For Masoumeh was a woman with many plans—to remarry, to get a driver's license, and to find a job. Concocting and executing these plans was a subject of group importance. On one occasion, Masoumeh started discussion by animatedly discussing how a young man was pursuing her at her driver's license classes. Fearing that his intentions were dishonest or prurient, she used the opportunity to start a phone acquaintanceship with him and teach him about how to seek relationships with women in a more "respectful manner."¹⁷⁸ As the group sat in amazed silence, Masoumeh described a telephone conversation wherein she advised him to regard her as a sister. Within minutes of this advice, she began informing him about the benefits of contraception and to respect a woman as he would respect his female family members.

I remembered this particular anecdote when Masoumeh was describing the care she took of her body. In her words, she paid great attention to her appearance and always tried to carry herself in a respectful manner. Noticeably, Masoumeh does not mention any health regime she followed as a result of her being HIV-positive. In fact, she made no references to her health status. For her, paying attention to her body meant that she should consult medical professionals, such as the gynecologist. For her, the reasons stemmed from "wanting to be cute, for my heart to be happy." Ten years ago, she stated this was not the case, yet did not explain why.

¹⁷⁸ It was understood that the young man desired to have casual sexual relations with Masoumeh.

I found our conversations as animated as her anecdotes, filled with comical moments when Masoumeh drew attention to various parts of her body in order to demonstrate certain points. When I asked her a question about her faith practices, followed by a question about the differences she perceived between men and women, she recounted the following advice her (deceased) husband had given her. I include our conversation as it transpired:

I'm religious, but a believer? To the first degree, the highest level? Yes, to the level that my hair not be shown, or a man shouldn't see my waist, I'm not that strict. But I'm also not so comfortable to uncover my neck in front of a *mard-e namahram*.¹⁷⁹ I'm sensitive to my ankles...that men not see my legs. (I laugh, asking her why.) We think it's extremely inappropriate. We say if a man sees a woman's legs, it's like he's seeing your vagina. It makes no difference if a man sees either. (She laughs). It's what we say. We say that from the ankles, he would understand what's going on up there and how is it (She points to her groin area.)

This mention of the sensitivity afforded to the ankle area was also broached during my conversation with Maryam, yet her reason differed from Masoumeh's. For Maryam, religious observance did not factor into her decision to not show her ankles to others, except to her husband. It was more a matter of expressing both her respect to her husband. Also, equally important, she felt more comfortable wearing trousers than wearing skirts.

Maryam's comments were in mind when I inquired again from Masoumeh where she heard about the sensitivity of the ankle area. She answered,

I heard this from my husband, and I discovered it was right [assumption]...It's the same thing with the neck. It doesn't make a difference if a man sees the neck...the neck is important, and so are the ankles. If a man sees this, they'll become seduced. I believe in this 100 percent...No, there are three areas: the neck, the ankles, and the behind. The buttocks protrude out. I'm thin, I was *chadori*, but now that my eyesight is weak, I don't wear the *chador*. But when I went out with the *chador*, when it was windy and thundering, my husband would tell me 'You musn't go out, your *chador* clings to your butt, and

¹⁷⁹ See Chapter Four of this dissertation for an explanation of the *mahram/namahram* paradigm.

men will look at it.' He didn't like it at all; he was sensitive to this. Based on repeated episodes of that happening, I got used to [wearing the *chador* this way]. [Outside] when I see that someone's back area is tight, I think it's like I'm a man looking at her butt, especially when it's big and chubby. (*And so what should women do?*) They should wear looser clothing.

She offered another example,

...or during prayer, when a *mard-e namahram* sits behind a woman, if a woman knows that he is sitting behind them, when they bow down, they should be aware that their *chador* doesn't go in the line between their butts...Did you see that some women wear tight clothing so that you can see their bra strap? That's a big sin...They are sinning.

Here, transgression is manifested through an act that Masoumeh found immodest, self-promoting, and exhibitionist for the purposes of sexually attracting the opposite sex. She imagined a similar scenario transpiring during a moment of prayer, when opposite sexes who were unrelated to one another were placed in compromising situations. In this case, it was the onus of the woman to make sure her modesty was preserved. This scenario appeared more imaginative than actual. For in the Shi'a-Iranian context, men and women are advised to (and generally do) pray in separate spaces, or they are separated by some kind of barrier, so that this situation does not happen in the first place.

Even though Masoumeh did not explicitly reference any religious sources for the connections she made between the ankle and the vagina, she implied that either of their exposure would result in the same offense: temptation and sin. This relationship is perhaps attributed to her acknowledgment of a Muslim concept on intimate bodily parts, known as *awrat*, which is mentioned several times in the *Qur'an*, as well as in *hadith* literature. According to consensus among Islamic *fiqh* scholars, the exposure of private parts is forbidden, though there is some differentiation about which parts of the male and female bodies are considered *awrat*. Some scholars state that only the vagina, penis, and

buttocks are considered private parts, whereas others designate that for women, their entire bodies are *awrat*. Shi'a understanding, based on sixth Imam Ja'far al-Sadiq's religious commentaries, believes that the concept of *awrat* includes women's bodies, save their faces and hands.¹⁸⁰ Ayatollah Khomeini, the Islamic Republic's founder and Grand Ayatollah, wrote in *Tahrir al-Vasileh*, that at the time of prayer, women's *awrat*, is her entire body, including her head and hair, except for her face, hands, and feet.¹⁸¹

Masoumeh's subtle engagement with the religious concept of *awrat* was an important authoritative source for her conceptualization of body image. But it was one of many sources she consulted; another influential force was the opinion of her husband. He insisted that she not be desired by others and thus insisted she dress modestly in order to preserve her reputation and not invite attention from the opposite sex. Masoumeh knew which parts of the female body were sensitive to the opposite sex and thus she diverted her eyes from looking in their direction. Notably, she reminded herself that the lustful gaze towards a woman's body, an act she associated with male behavior, was something any person could easily slip into. When this happened, she slipped into the gazing position of the male observer and this made her feel uncomfortable. To avoid this discomfort, she instructed women to wear looser clothing. It is worth noting that she did not advise that men, too, should look away.

¹⁸⁰ Men's *awrat* is their buttocks, according to Jafar al-Saddiq. The concept of *awrat* is studied by anthropologist Haideh Moghissi, who provides a contextual analysis of the many uses of *awrat* in the *Qur'an* and *hadith* literature, which has often been associated with women's bodily weakness. Moghissi argues that a more suitable definition should be "involute vulnerability," as reference to the broader notions of Arabo-Islamic sanctity and privacy of the home and family. See Haideh Moghissi, *Women and Islam: Social Conditions, Obstacles, and Prospects* (New York: Routledge, 2005), pp. 81-83.

¹⁸¹ Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, *Tahrir al-Vasileh*, vol. 1, Chapter 129, lines 3-11.

Concluding Remarks: Imagining a Non-taboo Embodiment of HIV/AIDS

For this particular group of women, HIV/AIDS is one variable, among many others, constructing their worldviews, daily schedules, and lifestyle choices. These interviews clearly attest to the fact that HIV/AIDS does not control how they live their lives nor does it alter significantly their personal interests and biases. According to one of the women I interviewed, the disease is described as *just* a virus, not a debilitating death sentence and certainly not a definite taboo-marker. In fact, it is a negotiable status they reveal to some, hide from others, and, at times, speak about with reverence. For some of the women, how they contracted the virus has influenced their perceptions of HIV/AIDS and in particular their opinions of men.¹⁸²

In my interactions and conversations with them, each woman reflected on her individual process of improving awareness of nutrition and health while simultaneously maintaining a positive relationship with her body. Some even conversed about how their experiences would lead to future roles as health and cultural ambassadors for the disease. Through educating first themselves, then their families, and finally the Iranian public about HIV/AIDS facts and prevention, perhaps their health status would eventually be treated as a non-taboo laden illness such as cancer. In such a case, it would be regarded as a disease affecting the general public and not necessarily one targeting a particular social group, class, sexual practice, and lifestyle.

The purpose of this chapter is not to provide a comprehensive or detailed account of their daily lives. Nor does this interview section seek to make any grand claims or

¹⁸² Although I know the mode of transmission for each interviewee, I did not feel comfortable revealing this information if the women themselves did not mention it during our one-on-one interviews. I became privy to the mode of transmission for each participant throughout attending SPASDI's meetings.

judgments about the health, piety, sexuality, or lifestyle choices of HIV-positive Iranian women. Instead, this chapter turns to layered episodes within their personal lives —some of which deal with HIV, others which sidestep its importance— to diversify the content of health reports and expand the target audiences of HIV/AIDS official discourse in Iran.

This chapter has drawn from the reflections of four Iranian women about their individual perceptions and experiences, covering a range of topics, from sexuality to breastfeeding to health. The experiential knowledge they impart elucidates the interrelated demands and expectations they carry for themselves, their families, and their peers. The participants individually comment on their personal journeys, telling anecdotes of struggle and failure, as well as of overcoming health problems, economic obstacles, and family strife. Encouraged by the growing numbers of nongovernmental and volunteer HIV health advocates, they participate in these groups having much at stake —their family reputation, their health, and their financial survival, for instance.

As Iris Marion Young has written, “The body as lived is always layered with social and historical meaning and is not some primitive matter prior to or underlying economic and political relations or cultural meanings.”¹⁸³ This last chapter, contributing to the growing ethnographic literature on the diversity of women’s experiences in Iran, invokes Young’s assessment. In many ways, their individual responses reflect a chorus of sameness and difference. Like many women around the globe, they attempt to maintain healthy, marital relations, find a career that suits them, provide for their families, and feel a sense of security. However, these desires are impacted not only by the politicization of health care for those living with the HIV-virus, but also by the virus’s stigmatized status,

¹⁸³ Iris Marion Young, *On Female Body Experience: ‘Throwing Like a Girl’ and Other Essays* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), p. 7.

fueling negative perceptions of these women's lifestyles, sexual behaviors, and value systems.

These interviews also shed light on the real impact of shifting public health policies on HIV in the last decade—that the communities impacted by the disease (which were once identified in official reports as prisoners and drug addicts) now include a growing number of widowed, divorced, and unmarried women. Despite the precarious welfare assistance and the stigmatization that refers to them as a “high-risk population” participating in illegal, underground activities (such as prostitution, drug use, and errant sexual practice), for these women living with HIV, they persist in attempting to transform public and clerical perceptions about the disease.

Obviously, these interviews provide rich material with which to further examine the unique situation of HIV-AIDS in Iran. This analysis is the proverbial tip of the iceberg in understanding how these women live within a matrix of contesting cultural practices, changing state policies, and religiously defined moral imperatives. The purpose of this chapter is to gain understanding of the diversity of experiences for women with HIV; these interviews contrast the opinions, analyses, and statistics presented in MOHME reports and jurisprudential literature. By inquiring about breastfeeding experiences, I encountered variegated messages the importance of health and body maintenance. I heard fascinating anecdotes about maintaining desire and femininity. Moreover, I learned about subtle expressions of collaboration and resistance—of coalition-forming between social workers, the MOHME, and clerics; of organizing public awareness campaigns to confront HIV-positive persons' stigmatization. Indeed, by attending SPASDI's *Madaran-e Hami-ye Salamat* workshops, they are participating in a

courageous act — by not remaining silent about their illness, they pressure the Iranian government and general public to acknowledge a social reality and emerging public health issue expanding in many communities. By the simple act of talking —about their experiences in front of their peers and family members, health officials, and strangers— they generate other discussions in society about breaking down the assumptions and stereotypes associated with men and women carrying the virus. Moreover, as the numbers increase, of men and women publicizing the disease and their personal stories of contraction and survival, the responsibility to act shifts towards health officials, politicians, and the clerical leadership to thoroughly address official approaches and policies on maternal health, drug prevention, sexual education, and HIV preventive care.

Given these interviews and what they reveal about the diversity of desires and opinions of this group of women, I present the following questions: What becomes of other HIV-positive women who do not have access to support networks such as SPASDI? Do official pressures about ideal motherhood, coupled with the lack of public data and dialogue about diverse (and alternative) sexual attitudes and behaviors in Iran, mean that the HIV epidemic will reach more alarming levels? Or will clerical authorities and other religious and state figures popular among the regime follow a different route: that is, to break their own red lines and hence speak honestly about the social realities of HIV-AIDS?

DISSERTATION CONCLUSION

Following the demise of the Pahlavi monarchy, the Islamic Republic, founded upon Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini's doctrinal interpretation of Islamic government, commenced robust cultural campaigns to construct and foster a morally-guided space within which Iranians would interact and practice their faith in the spirit of "Islamic norms and principles." Yet fundamental to this enterprise was the subduing of female sexuality through legal, political, economic and social methods of control. But what happens when scholars sidestep the barriers between these two periods, such as ideological foundation, and deconstruct the methods and tools of enforcement by locating their origins within the Pahlavi era? How then would one's analysis of "post-revolutionary Iran" transform if he or she were to present the country's modernization reform programs of the 1960s as enacting a similar form of social control? Moreover, per the government regulation of sexuality, what can be understood about the politics of intimacy, if studied across an extended period of time covering the social policies of two regimes?

What began as an inquiry about the image of a mutilated mannequin on an innocuous street in Tehran soon developed into a larger exploration of the historical and conceptual regulation of women—in particular, of female sexuality. The potential threat it poses in both public space and in heterosocial relations that are not Islamically-sanctioned is a topic of great contention and public importance. The simultaneous threat and allure of women—even in their representations as mannequins and statues—have occupied pivotal places in the formulation and implementation of Iran's social policy and

cultural reform agenda. The notion that merely gazing upon the physical features of a woman will lead to societal corruption (in the form of unrestrained, sexual explosion) has invigorated, in recent years, calls to rein in and reform deviant expressions and works of art deemed immoral. No longer are depictions of women accused of dressing immodestly or of provoking desire tolerated for display.

The body of a woman has become the visual and conceptual focal point of government-administered social and cultural reforms —regardless if their aim is to discourage traditional practice and custom or to eradicate deviance and corruption. This means that the moral jurisdiction of the state designates which bodies are modern, clean, pious, favorable, and worth memorializing. This also means that whatever potency the state possesses can be administered through vast manipulations and erasures of the public (social) memory, the public (social) body and the private (physical) body. As such, bodies, in their many states of representation, compliance, and resistance, can be physically and publicly forgotten through legal and extra-legal structures, business development, compulsory *hejab*, landmark destruction, and, moreover, in the outright denial of their importance and value.

In the introduction of this dissertation, I asked: how are bodily technologies constructed discursively and socially in Iran, and in particular, what values and perspectives are built into them, serving to dictate what kind of realities, lifestyles, and desires are both permissible and accessible? Indeed, the response to this inquiry is intricately formed, given the investigation of five unique sites, which bridge together Pahlavi-era state regulations to those of the cleric-led Islamic Republic. In most of these sites, the body is one of the ways through which sexuality is regulated; in others,

sexuality is disciplined through spatial cleansing. It is controlled through the dispersing and internalizing of positive ideals; moreover, it is restrained through compulsory forgetting, when ahistorical narratives are emphasized repeatedly in order to deny the practices and institutions of both the past and present.

In this discussion of popular women's magazine *Zan-e Rouz*, former red-light district *Shahr-e No*, temporary marriage or *sigheh*, public artworks depicting women, and a non-governmental HIV-AIDS organization in Tehran, bodily technologies act as the pivots and points of departure for how *ulama*, the media, government bodies such as the Supreme Council for the Cultural Revolution, as well as other political and social actors, facilitate the sexual and social control of Iranian men and women. As the question above illustrates, promoting values is an essential strategy in assuring the efficacy of cultural campaigns designed to modify a person's behavior, lifestyle, and point-of-view. Furthermore, the articulation and continual emphasis of these ideals and values, which are broadcast to a mass audience, is fundamental to promoting (and later institutionalizing) the triumph and endurance of one political authority over another.

As elaborated in each dissertation chapter, positive ideals about sexuality, marriage, motherhood, and health are used not only to encourage changes in behavior, but also to accentuate the existence and ongoing significance of governmental red lines. They are drawn for the overall benefit of the general body politic. In the case of the compulsory *hejab* and the extension of this policy to statues depicting women in public squares, for example, red lines are demarcated by "societal standards." Appealing to the ambiguous meaning of this phrase, state officials (and modern art museum directors) communicate the expectations of a religious society towards "erotic art." In defense of,

and in deference to, “Islamic norms and principles,” mannequins, statues, and monuments are modified to safeguard the public, heterosexual gaze and to ensure propriety among Iranians. Yet, the outcome of this kind of strategy—especially when it is applied arbitrarily, as is the case of mannequins suggests— is the following: certain bodies go into hiding; they become absent; they are erased; or they resort to a kind of mutilation.

In this exploration of bodily technologies, I trace their mutations from one form into another; their re-codings into ideological identities; and even their dismissal after periods of inefficacy. As one focuses on the intricate manner of their interactions, other mini-narratives and discourses emerge about the conceptualizations of public space, gender, sexuality, marriage, and health in state, religious, and academic discourses. Through this surfacing, one discovers the grey areas, so to speak, of formerly untold and peculiar collaborations between apparatuses of the state and the advertising industry or the global sex trade. In the latter instance, when investigating the prostitution policy during consecutive administrations, one identifies a tacit acceptance of the sexual exploitation of women in the domain of prostitution. This motif carries on well into the Islamic Republic even despite official government and clerical remonstrations to the contrary.

Moreover, in the course of this analysis, there were connections made between the methods of enforcement and the technologies of reform— at times, their purpose and aims were somewhat indistinguishable from one another. Recall, for instance, the Pahlavi-era method of reform in the name of modernization and the Islamic Republic’s initial steps to encourage piety and modesty among its Islamic revolutionary supporters.

In seeking the emancipation of its female citizens, Pahlavi reformers translated political and social liberation as the improving and refashioning of Iranian woman's behavior, dress, social interactions, physical appearance, and pastimes. With *Shahbanu* at the helm of this reform, the project of cultivating a "modern" woman's desires had found its human embodiment to promote them—in the figure of a sophisticated and fashionable Iranian queen who traveled the globe and, in more quiet moments, read books with her children. Although educational reforms were part of the modernization program, they were sidelined in the face of the growing influence of popular women's magazines and television—emerging giants within Iran's mediascape that helped advertise desires, both consumer and sexual, to a broader audience. After 1979, supporters of Ayatollah Khomeini working within both industries, slightly changed course; co-opting the rhetoric of reform from the previous regime, they began to encourage piety, motherhood, and revolutionary Islamic values for the modern Iranian woman. Promoting family values ground in Islamic discourse, they crafted a model Islamic character of womanhood, encouraging women to embrace this gendered, religious and political identity.

In both cases, the reform agendas are united by a hegemonic conceptualization of women: first, that women are the boundary-making objects of the nation-state and second, that women are necessarily and naturally receptive to reform, guidance, and discipline from above. Thus the very methods employed to promote reform among women are also being used to restrict certain expressions and ways of living. They are also used to subdue the fostering of specific social and political identities by outlining the behavior and appearance that constitutes as normative or religiously and/or socially

acceptable, separating from this group those considered deviant, backward, and/or morally reprehensible.

In this dissertation, it is argued that even despite the change in regimes, from Pahlavi dynasty to clerical-led Islamic Republic, there are both ruptures and continuities in the regulation of sexuality. Though plainly stated, it illustrates the importance of identifying not just the political and social actors who seek to bring about a particular objective, but also the style and method of governance and its impact as it is felt and experienced by marginalized communities. Analyzing the choice and method of regulation lends insight into the formation of heterotopic sites of inclusion and exclusion. Time and again, they are constructed, abolished, and restored in an effort to protect the status quo or ensure the safety of the greater public good. Yet this often happens at the expense of others; for those members of society thought to be perpetually “in crisis,” such as prostitutes, people living with HIV, and temporary wives, their social and conceptual exclusion are now matters of life and death.

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